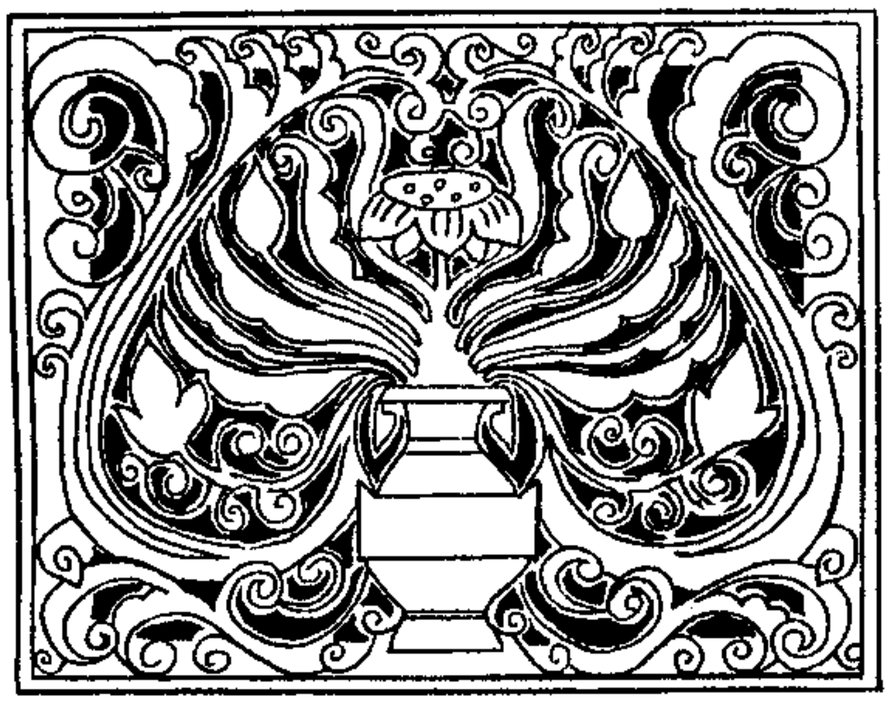

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**JUNE 1998**

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 103 JUNE 1998 No. 6

# Divine Wisdom

## THE COMPLETION OF DAKSHA'S SACRIFICE

*(Sri Hari's Response to Hymns in His Praise and Daksha's Sacrifice)*

श्रीभगवानुवाच
अहं ब्रह्मा च शर्वश्च जगत: कारणं परम्।
आत्मेश्वर उपद्रष्टा स्वयंदृगविशेषण:॥

*Sri Bhagavan said:* I, who am known as the supreme cause of the worlds, its soul, its ruler, the witness of everything, the self-effulgent being and attributeless Absolute — in truth I am both Brahma and Rudra.

आत्ममायां समाविश्य सोऽहं गुणमयीं द्विज।
सृजन् रक्षन् हरन् विश्वं
दध्रे संज्ञां क्रियोचिताम्॥

O learned one! Verily I assume different names like Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara, appropriate for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe, which I perform by assuming My *Yogamaya,* which has its three consituent *guṇas* of *sattva, rajas* and *tamas.*

तस्मिन् ब्रह्मण्यद्वितीये केवले परमात्मनि।
ब्रह्मरुद्रौ च भूतानि भेदेनाज्ञोऽनुपश्यति॥

In Me, the all-comprehending and all-pervading Self, known as Brahman, the ignorant man sees Brahma, Rudra and other entities as different.

यथा पुमान्न स्वाङ्गेषु शिर:पाण्यादिषु क्वचित्।
पारक्यबुद्धिं कुरुते एवं भूतेषु मत्पर:॥

Just as a man will not consider the members of his body like the head and the limbs as different from himself but only parts of himself, so does one who has taken refuge in Me see all beings as parts of Me.

त्रयाणामेकभावानां यो न पश्यति वै भिदाम्।
सर्वभूतात्मनां ब्रह्मन् स शान्तिमधिगच्छति॥

He attains eternal peace who does not perceive any difference between the three — Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara — who are one in nature and who pervade all beings.

*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam,* 4.7.50–4

# Fixing the Mind on God-V

Even though endowed with all the four gifts from God discussed in the last month's editorial, there is need for yet something more: the grace of one's own mind. Until one gets the grace of one's own mind, one will not be inclined to put to useful purpose the rare gift of *mantra* one has received from one's Guru. Singing the song of Rāmprasād,

> We tell you the secret that we know —
> The secret whereby we ourselves, and
> others, with our help,
> Have passed through many a time of peril;
> Now it all depends on you.

Sri Ramakrishna says:

> ...That is to say, renounce everything and call on God. He alone is real; all else is illusory. Without the realization of God everything is futile. This is the great secret.[1]

This grace of the mind presents itself to an aspirant in the form of: (i) intense renunciation and yearning for God-vision, (ii) practice, (iii) prayer, (iv) love of solitude, (v) self-surrender to God, and (vi) same-sightedness in his dealings with others. We shall briefly touch upon some of these in the following pages.

One learns the mode of spiritual practice from one's own Guru. So we do not discuss it here. Yet there are certain points in practice which may be discussed, for these are many times lost sight of. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna have repeatedly given many directions in this regard. We merely share some of these with the reader.

Sri Ramakrishna, praising the acting of an actor, relates it immediately to spiritual practice by saying, 'Just as you practise much in order to sing, dance, and play on instruments, so one should practise the art of fixing the mind on God. One should practise regularly such disciplines as worship, japa, and meditation.'[2]

The Holy Mother who herself repeated the *mantra* a lakh times daily even amidst her many daily chores says, 'One should meditate regularly at fixed hours, for who knows when the auspicious moment will come when one will have the vision of the Divine. Such a moment comes suddenly without any premonition. So one should keep to the routine however much one's mind might be disturbed.'[3] We may also recall in this connection that Swami Trigunatitananda, who received initiation from the Holy Mother, also used to repeat the *mantra* a lakh times daily thereby earning for himself the name 'babaji'. We must be ready to receive the Guru and God at all times in the inner chamber of our heart, and this can be achieved only by regularly adhering to the spiritual practice at fixed times and increasing the duration of our calling on God steadily till it becomes uninterrupted.

Swami Brahmananda says:

> Practise a little meditation and japa every day. Never stop for a single day. The mind is like a restless child; it wants to run away. You must bring it back again and apply it to the meditation on the Lord. Go on this way for two or three years, and then an inexpressible joy will fill your mind.[4]

The term 'a little meditation' has been

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), p. 95. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]
2. *Gospel*, p. 427.
3. Holy Mother in *Spiritual Talks* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), p. 20. [Hereafter, *Talks*.]
4. Swami Brahmananda in *Talks*, p. 25.

used by Swami Brahmananda so that the aspirant exercises some caution and does not overdo (in the beginning) with consequent evil effects:

> Dhyana is at first nothing but struggling with the mind, bringing it again and again from its flights to the sacred feet of the Lord. This very soon heats the brain. Therefore, in the beginning one must not exert the brain too much, or hold the breath too long. When one gets real meditation, one can easily continue for three or four hours; then one will feel extremely refreshed in body and mind after meditation as after a sound, deep sleep.[5]

There should however be a longing to get that 'real meditation' and spiritual life is more this longing than it is regimentation. God is not a commodity that can be purchased by the repetition of the *mantra* a fixed number of times. He is obtained through Love as He is of the nature of Love. It is even good to feel distressed that we do not have that longing to have 'real meditation' and be disturbed that the mind is ever ruffled, that without God's and Guru's grace we cannot sail this boat of our lives to its destination. But then real longing does manifest itself in a continued remembrance of God and repetition of His Holy Name with a simultaneous recognition that God is our only refuge.

So that people do not remain content all their life with a 'little meditation' every day, so that people try eventually to plunge into deep meditation, Swami Premananda gives the counter warning:

> A little meditation is no good. God cannot be realized through such lukewarm moods. One must yearn deeply, one must become restless.[6]

Even as one must have dispassion for the world, which is just a negative attitude towards worldly pleasures seeing defects therein, one must have the positive attitude, that of passion for God and God-vision. The goal of human life is God-vision and not dispassion for the world or leading merely an austere life, though these are important.

Some find daily works distasteful and blame that work disturbs them in their meditation, but this may be merely because work is troublesome and one has not tried to make work helpful to meditation. Work performed with the right spirit and regular meditation should go hand in hand. Then one derives profit in spiritual life. Otherwise work is a mere drudgery. It is not that work disturbs one's meditation but that the lurking desires in the mind make meditation distasteful. Says Swami Premananda:

> One must have intense indifference to the world and deep hankering after the Lord, 'I must realize Him even in this birth, even now!' No slow process! Remember this carefully: *Work is no use if you do not get immersed in Him.* Make your heart a temple of the Lord and install Him there. Take His name and for ever lose yourself in Him.[7]

Even as one must plunge into God's Name, simultaneously we should take care to see that the 'anchor' is removed and that under the effect of strenuously 'rowing the boat' it plunges forward and does not remain stationary. Swami Premananda therefore cautions:

> Along with meditation and repetition of the Lord's name, *we must reason keenly and carefully — we must search out the desires hiding in the dark corners of the mind and drive them away.* That is what is called in the Gita as 'saving the self by the self'. Thus we are to conquer the mind.... Simply meditating or repeating God's names, without any effort at rooting out desire, will not do.[8]

What will a man do whose mind is deluded and whose mental distractions are far too many to handle? The suggestion given by Sri Ramakrishna, which may appeal to his devotess, may be used by others

---

5. Swami Brahmananda in *Talks*, p. 32.
6. Swami Premananda in *Talks*, p. 70-1.
7. Swami Premananda in *Talks*, p. 74.
8. Swami Premananda in *Talks*, pp. 79–80.

with reference to the Chosen Ideal they believe in:

> Look here, once think of this (showing himself) before sitting down for meditation. Why do I say so? Because you have faith here. Thinking of this will remind you of that divine Lord. Haven't you noticed? Just as when one sees a herd of cows, one remembers the cowherd, when one sees the son, one is remembered of the father, when one sees a pleader, one recalls the court, even so is this case. Do you understand? The mind is scattered here, there and everywhere; thinking of this it will get collected in one place and right meditation will follow when it is directed on God.[9]

Sri Ramakrishna himself used to follow similar methods during his period of *sadhana:* 'I [Sri Ramakrishna] used to show to my mind the image of Bhairava in meditation on the parapet of the roof of the music-hall and say to it, "You must be firm and motionless like it and meditate on Mother's Lotus Feet."' And with what result?

> No sooner had I sat down for meditation than I heard clattering sounds produced in the joints of my body and limbs from the direction of the leg upwards; and they got locked one after another as if someone from within turned the keys. As long as I meditated, I had no power to move my body and change my posture even slightly or give up meditation and go elsewhere or do anything else at will. I was, as it were, forcibly made to sit in the same posture, as long as the joints did not make clattering sounds as before and were unlocked, this time from the direction of the head to the legs.[10]

Meditation on the form of God is highly efficacious. Discussing the purification of the mind, Swami Turiyananda says: 'Meditate on His lotus feet; the senses will withdraw themselves and the mind will lose itself in Him.'[11] In his hymn to Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda highlights the efficacy of worshipping day and night, with yearning, the compassionate lotus feet of God for removing ignorance, the source of all misery.[12] Further, Swami Vivekananda in his hymn to the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna describes the saving power of his divine form: 'One glancing vision at Thine eyes divine / Cleared by the collyrium of Jnana / Defies delusion. O thou blotter-out / Of all the taints of sin, Intelligence / Pure, unmingled is Thy form. Of the world / Thou art embellisher. Self-luminous / Art Thou. O Ocean of feeling sublime, / And of Love Divine, O God-maddened One, / Devotees win Thy blessed feet and cross / Safely the swelling sea of Samsara.'[13]

An important aspect of spiritual practice is self-examination. Says Swami Turiyananda, 'Self-examination is a very difficult task. It is extremely difficult to detect the many tricks that the mind plays.'[14] Yet it must be done to gain an 'intimate knowledge' of one's mind. One must weigh carefully how much of the day one spends stressing 'me and mine' (i.e. lives in 'me and mine' which is ignorance) and how much of the day one spends in 'Thee and Thine' (lives in the thought of God).

The *Gita* gives to one hope in spiritual pursuit when it says: 'The mind, O Arjuna, is controlled by practice and non-attachment', 'one should slowly withdraw one's mind from sense-objects through patient discrimination. Fixing the mind on the Self, one must no more think of anything else.' This harmonizes both the slow and steady

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9. *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1990), p. 376. [Hereafter, *Great Master*].
10. *Great Master,* p. 142.
11. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks,* p. 94.
12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 8 vols., 1989; 9th vol., 1997), vol. 8, p. 172.) [Hereafter, *CW.*]
13. *CW,* vol. 4, p. 505.
14. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks,* p. 186–7.

effort that is ideal for a beginner, and a whole-souled determined effort at keeping the sense-objects under control as one progresses. The culmination is also pictured as fixing the mind on the Self and the Self alone.

Highlighting the importance of self-exertion in creating one's destiny and of ultimately resigning to God's will, Swami Turiyananda says:

> In a way everything depends on our personal exertion. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* has highly extolled this. I do not mean to say that destiny is altogether a fiction. *Daivaṁ nihatya kuru pauruṣamātmaśaktyā* — 'manifest the manliness by ousting destiny through thy own power'. To one who is endowed with personal exertion, even destiny becomes favourable. God helps those who help themselves. Relying on destiny people often tend towards degradation. Free-will also comes under this personal exertion. People make mistakes through their own fault, and then lay the blame on destiny. Stumbling on the way is an accident — going along is the natural course. Making mistakes is an accident — rising higher and higher is the natural course. ...Unless one acts like that, nothing can be done. But then, there is such a thing as resignation to the Lord. It is no weakness to say, 'Thy will be done.'[15]
>
> *Ya icchati hariṁ smartuṁ*
> *vyāpārastagatairapi;*
> *Samudre śāntakallole*
> *snātumicchati durmatiḥ.*
> *He who wishes to think upon the Lord after all his engagements have been finished, is like the fool who wishes to bathe in the sea after the waves have subsided.*
>
> One wishing to bathe in the sea waits and waits with the idea that one would have a plunge when the waves would have subsided. Nonsense! Will that moment ever come! Instead of doing so, you buffet against the waves, have your bath, and come out. The sea remains always the same. So in this world, you must manage to call upon the Lord *in the midst of these waves*. It is a wild-goose-chase to be on the look-out for opportunities. Now or never. Apply yourselves to it, and disadvantages will turn into advantages.[16]

Prayer in the form of crying to God for help, helps. A stern Advatin like Swami Turiyananda also says: 'The Lord is greatly pleased if one cries to Him. The tears of love wash away all mental impurities accumulated through ages. It is very good to cry to God.'[17] Prayer is one way in which one can have a constant recollection and contemplation of Him. On what to pray for, several suggestions are given in spiritual books:

Holy Mother gives us one form of prayer, 'O Lord, even in the moon there are stains. May my mind be absolutely spotless.'

Quoting Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Turiyananda says, 'Do whatever you like after making the knowledge of oneness your own,' and interprets it to mean that one should know the Lord as the Soul of our souls, the Life of our lives, the Eye of our eyes and love Him. *True devotion does not consist in asking things of God*. Supreme devotion arises only when there is not the slightest tinge of desire in the mind. Swami Turiyananda prescribes *prayer for Bhakti* since a prayer for Bhakti is not a desire in the ordinary sense of the term: 'May I keep Thee in mind under all conditions! May I never fall into any other company than that of Thy devotees!'[18]

Another very good form of prayer is given by Swami Turiyananda:

> Every day before our very eyes our term of life is wearing out, and youth is decaying. Days once past never return, and Time is crushing the universe. Fortune, too, is fickle like the play of ripples on the surface of the water, and life itself is brief like lightning. Therefore, O Lord, Thou refuge to all, protect

15. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, pp. 172–3.

16. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, pp. 184–5.
17. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, p. 95.
18. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, p. 106.

me who have taken shelter at Thy feet, before it is too late.[19]

Prayer must come from deep within, being born out of one's frank realization of the need to pray. Even as prayer is spontaneous, it also becomes persistent. 'Rob Him of His peace, as it were, by your constant and incessant prayers', says Swami Turiyananda and gives the picture, 'When the child weeps only a little, the mother does not think of coming. But when the child cries itself hoarse and knows no stopping, then the mother comes and takes it in her arms.'[20]

Lest mankind make the mistake of praying for mundane things, Sri Ramakrishna himself gives several forms of prayer:

> O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy Hallowed Feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends — a love craved by the devotees for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O Mother, that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching māyā, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold', conjured up by Thy inscrutable māyā! O Mother, there is no one but Thee whom I call my own. Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy Lotus Feet.[21]

Combining the recognition of the transitory nature of all existence and the keen desire of a devotee to realize God, Sri Ramakrishna suggests the prayer:

> There is nobody in this world who is my own. Those whom I call my own are here only for two days. God alone is my own. He alone is my all in all. Alas, how shall I realize Him?[22]

The study of spiritual literature reveals many other wordings of prayer which will be suitable to an aspirant in his current state of evolution. Regular study of devotional scriptures will therefore enable one to find out for oneself the form of prayer which best fits his present mood.

There are several attitudes towards God which one may assume in order to realize God. Sri Ramakrishna enumerates the familiar five basic attitudes: śānta, dāsya, sakhya, vātsalya and madhura.

> Śānta, the serene attitude. The rishis of the olden times had this attitude toward God. They did not desire any worldly enjoyment....
>
> Dāsya, the attitude of a servant toward his master. Hanuman had this attitude toward Rāma. He felt the strength of a lion when he worked for Rāma....
>
> Sakhya, the attitude of friendship. Friends say to one another, 'Come here and sit near me.' Śridāma and other friends sometimes fed Krishna with fruit, part of which they had already taken, and sometimes climbed on His shoulders.
>
> Vātsalya, the attitude of a mother toward her child. This was Yaśoda's attitude toward Krishna.... The mother feels happy only when the child has eaten to his heart's content. Yaśoda would roam about with butter in her hand, in order to feed Krishna.
>
> Madhura, the attitude of a woman toward her paramour. Rādhā had this attitude toward Krishna. The wife also feels it for her husband. This attitude includes all the other four.[23]

There are other forms of relationships but in all of these the emphasis is on constant remembrance of God. The underlying principle is[24]: 'If there is concentration on any single object, there the idea of God manifests

19. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, p. 232–3.
20. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, pp. 298–9.
21. *Gospel*, p. 731.
22. *Gospel*, p. 856.
23. *Gospel*, p. 115.
24. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, pp. 153–4.

itself. Lust, anger, fear, affection — any of these may bring about concentration. Lust — as in the case of Gopis; anger — as with Kamsa; fear — as in the case of Shishupala; affection — as with Mother Yashoda; and so on.

*Kāmaṁ krodhaṁ bhayaṁ snehaṁ*
*aikyaṁ sauhṛdameva ca;*
*Nityaṁ harau vidadhato*
*yānti tanmayatāṁ hi te.*

*Lust, anger, fear, affection, anuity and friendship — those who always cherish any of these feelings towards God, assuredly attain to concentration on Him.*[25]

But even for this it is absolutely necessary for the mind to be pure. There is a definite knowledge that the common human emotions are directed *to God*. Thus, for example, lust for God saves the man whereas lust in the worldly sense degrades him and makes him bound to the world of the senses. Anger, if it is directed to God, saves him because of his constant remembrance of God *as God* though with anger. Similarly is it with the other common human weaknesses when they are directed to God.

A combination of the repetition of God's Name, studying scriptures and doing unselfish action in the spirit of service to God are highly effective and recommended. This habit helps one till his last moment. When with the advance in age one is no more able to exert and work for others unselfishly, the habit of study enables him to keep his mind on a high plane. With a further advance in age, when eye-sight also becomes weak, one can place more emphasis on repetition of the Name of God.

One who wants to cultivate love of God, does not seek to live in worldly company; rather he avoids it scrupulously. Worldly company becomes distasteful because the centre of all discussion and thinking in such a company is material gains and losses. This shunning of worldly company is not out of a sense of superiority (for, worldly men are definitely at a stage of spiritual growth; we were at that stage may be earlier in this life or in a previous existence even, and they will be where we are today either later in this life or in a future life) but only as a protection to the budding plant of one's spiritual life. If one cannot get the company of devotees (which is ideal) who delight in singing the praise of God, repeating His Holy Name, and recounting God's divine life on earth, solitude is preferable, provided one has advanced sufficiently to benefit therefrom. If one has not advanced sufficiently, it is better to live in the company of books which deal with spiritual matters, for many go mad by prematurely seeking solitude. Solitude should not be oppressive as it often is for many, forcing them to shout or play radios / tape-recorders / television, or simply to while away time in idle gossip. Solitude when it is loved and sought, is tasteful. As the human mind basically loves company, company of things and people outside may be given up only when one has developed a liking for internal company. So it is said that one cannot be in complete solitude until the mind is lost in Samadhi.[26] Ideally, when one loves solitude and by the grace of God finds oneself also in a location which has a fine scenery, one feels inclined to meditate losing oneself in God. In such an environment, the presence of others is often a deterrent.

One may not always get an environment of one's choice. Nor does one effectively utilize a suitable environment if God in His infinite mercy presents it to us. But then spiritual life is just that. One yearns for a suitable environment and like a fool wastes away an ideal environment which presents itself after much seeking and praying. This reminds one of the parable of Sri Ramakrishna where a man ties a cow to a

*(Continued on page 407)*

25. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 10.29.15.

26. Swami Brahmananda in *Talks*, p. 35.

# Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशया:।
क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे॥

*Bhidyate hṛdaya-granthiś-*
*chidyante sarva-saṁśayāḥ;*
*Kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi*
*tasmin dṛṣṭe parāvare.* (II.ii.8)

*When the Self which is both the high and the low (i.e., the cause-effect nature) is realized, the knot of the heart is loosened, all doubts become solved and all of one's deeds become dissipated.*

The *jīva* wants to know the result of this Self-knowledge attained through such introspection, self-discipline, self-control and dedication. We are being asked to withdraw our senses from enjoyment of worldly things and to dive deep into ourselves—but what will we gain by such a discipline? The answer is given in this *mantra.* The Upaniṣad is highly rational and wants only to bring about a change in our perspective of the world by directing our faculties of intelligence, emotions and will to realize the Essential Truth. The change of perspective is termed *darśana.* We have to see the Essential Truth amidst this apparent world, constantly changing and flowing in time. We make the mistake of thinking that intelligence without discipline can penetrate the veil of ignorance. Intelligence does penetrate, but it needs to be sharpened and strengthened to become capable of penetration. To do this, we need to have a tremendous control over our own propensities, i.e., there must be a strong ethical basis given to the intellect and it must be purified by improvement of personality and through self-mastery. Then only can we charge straight at our goal, like a rhinoceros, the term used by Buddha. Thus, we have to discipline ourselves with the *ṣaṭ sampattiḥ* (six divine treasures)—*śama, dama, uparati, titikṣā, śraddhā* and *samādhāna.* This is a necessary precondition for the change of perspective, by which the dissipation of energy is stopped and the penetrative intellect is developed to unveil the Truth. This *mantra* is the *phala-śruti,* telling us the end-result of hearing about the Truth, assimilating It and transforming ourselves. Then we are immersed in our real original nature and become *ānanda* and *amṛta-rūpa*—like a pot of water immersed in water, there is the same water both inside and outside, though the pot retains its own form. When the personality is immersed in the Absolute, we are aware of the Absolute *as well as* of ourselves; slowly we become aware of the Absolute *as* our Self. When the Self merges in the Absolute, one might live in a *bhāva-mukha* way (under divine command), either aware of oneself or of the Absolute, like Sri Ramakrishna who lived on the borderline between the phenomenal and the transcendental, sometimes tilting into the world of mortals with their misery, at other times tilting into the Absolute. To live in this *bhāva-mukha* way is possible for the *vijñāni* but not for the *jñāni.*

This *mantra* declares that the *granthi,* the knot of the heart within us (what psychologists call complexes), gets untied. It is due to ignorance of our true original nature, our misunderstanding of ourselves and the world, that we acquire endless desires and

feel incomplete and inadequate until those desires are fulfilled. Until we know *pūrṇatva* (by realizing our oneness with the universe, when, there being nothing besides, there will be no seeking), we will feel insufficient. To remove this deficiency we try to grab the whole world—money, name, fame, power and all sorts of conveniences. These 'creations' of wants are the knots within us which prevent us from seeing things in a simple manner. We do not try to know the real cause of our *apūrṇatā*, insufficiency, and instead we chase after the whole world to remove that imagined insufficiency by acquiring and possessing things. In trying to grab the world we entangle ourselves in endless knots, as it were, and lose our *ṛjutā*, simplicity, straightforwardness, and make our life a burning hell. The discipline of knowing our true original nature, if followed, will result in the loosening (*bhidyate*) of our knot in the heart (*hṛdaya-granthiḥ*). The teacher gives us the incentive that when this will happen to us, we reach the goal of *ātma-jñāna*. In order to explain how the complexes will disappear, there is this example of a raw gram and a raw gram that has been roasted or fried. Though both look alike, the raw gram when soaked overnight and sown, will sprout. But the roasted gram will never sprout. This roasted gram is in the condition of *bhidyate hṛdaya-granthiḥ;* the capacity of sprouting has been taken away from it. Its tendency of seeking for more and more in the world, for enjoyment, is gone. It is in the world, and looks like any other, but it has no desires. The further sprouting of desires, resulting in the creation of further knots, has disappeared by knowing its *pūrṇatā* (awareness of the wholeness of its true original nature). This is the 'negative' result of *ātma-jñāna*.

*Chidyante sarva saṁśayāḥ*—further, all doubts about the Atman will disappear. The doubts existed in the state of *jñāna*, mere intellectual knowledge, but it will not exist in the state of *vijñāna*, realization. Today we entertain doubts about God's existence. Why is He hidden and not an object of our experience—perceptual or intuitive? Such doubts will persist till *sākṣātkāra*, face-to-face encounter with Reality in *samādhi*. But once Atman or Brahman is experienced, all doubts assailing us today (about our *saccidānanda svarūpa*, whether we are on the right path or still in the domain of *māyā*) are set at naught.

Swami Premananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was then the manager of Belur Math. One day a young Swami had a little experience while in meditation. Being inexperienced and not able to evaluate himself, he thought he had attained the goal of life in *nirvikalpa samādhi*. The young swami was absolutely euphoric, and Swami Premananda embraced him with joy saying, 'May God bless you, I am proud of you. Now tell me, are you absolutely sure you have attained *Ātma-jñāna?* Think deeply.' That meant, are you absolutely *saṁśaya-sūnya*, without the slightest doubt? After Swami Premananda had put this question for the fourth time, the young Swami replied that he may have experienced *Ātma-jñāna*. Swami Premananda thereupon said, 'It has not happened, it has not happened, it has not happened'.[1] He said so because a trace of doubt remained in the young swami. The experience of oneness is of such a character and quality that there cannot arise any doubt. Thus, however intellectually one may be convinced about Atman, there is, before the realization of Atman, the doubt: whether It really exists, whether It is achievable, whether It has been achieved, and so on. But once spiritual experience descends on a person, all doubts are torn to shreds. This is not unique to spiritual life. Even in the phenomenal world many things are

1. In Bengali, Swami Premananda said, 'hoyni, hoyni, hoyni'.

known beyond a shadow of doubt. If one has seen the sun, then nobody can convince him that he has not seen it; it is a doubt-free experience. This is the 'positive' side of *Ātma-jñāna*, and a sure sign of a realized soul; he does not deceive himself. The Upaniṣad tells how to achieve this goal. If the experience is not mere euphoria or self-deception by imposition of grand ideas on oneself, if one is completely honest, then one will become totally *niḥsaṁśaya* (without any doubt).

The third result of *Ātma-jñāna* is described as *tasmin dṛṣṭe para-avare*, when the *sādhaka* (the aspirant) sees the sublime—both transcendental and immanent (*para and avara*)—that Brahman which is found both in the universe and in himself, both as the cause and the effect, the higher and the lower Brahman. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* the last vestige of his ego merges with the Absolute (*para*) and phenomenal world (*avara*). The whole diversity will remain, but the perspective of the realized soul changes; he now sees Reality behind all the appearances—even as Sri Ramakrishna saw all the images of Sri Krishna as really made of wax, he saw Brahman, the supreme, the sublime, peeping through every form. Then such a person's behaviour is fortified by this experience. Forms no longer have a hold on him but only the Essence has a hold on him. When this person comes out of *samādhi*, he sees the world as a unity in diversity, *sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ Brahma*. This is the condition of ecstasy of a *vijñāni*.

*Asya karmāṇi kṣīyante ca*—all the *karmas* of the *sādhaka* who has reached the goal are dissipated and dissolved. *Karma-vāda* (the doctrine of *karma*) declares that one suffers (and enjoys) the consequences of whatever one does; *ahaṁ kartā*, I am the doer, therefore, *ahaṁ bhoktā*, I am the enjoyer; 'I' or ego is the doer, and he alone has to enjoy the results accruing from his actions. But we find that in the world people also share in other's grief or joy. How does this happen? We project our 'I' partly on others due to affection, infatuation or blood-relationship, and then feel others' joy and sorrow by means of this identification.

We want to shed our responsibility if the result is bad and want to pass it on to somebody else! Man's life span is limited. The *jīva* performs many deeds—good and bad—and dies before he can enjoy or suffer their consequences. So he has to come back again to enjoy/suffer these consequences; otherwise, it will be the illogical case of the *karmaphala* (moral energy—good and evil—generated by the act) hanging in the air, unutilized and ineffective. So, the *jīva* migrates to a new body formed as a result of all his past *karma*. This is like the resultant force working on a particle of matter. There will be elimination of some forces and boosting of others, and ultimately the resultant force will take the *jīva* in a particular direction to a future birth. We do not know before-hand this resultant force. It is the past *karmas* which will determine the new life-form in which the *jīvātmā* will work out its destiny, to suffer the good, bad or indifferent results of his past *karma*. This cycle repeats birth after birth till the chain is severed by *Ātma-jñāna*.

Parapsychologists say that there are people who remember their past lives. It is also said that just before *Ātma-jñāna*, one becomes a *jātismara;* he remembers as in a cinema all of one's past lives and acts. This gives a little kick towards *vairāgya* or renunciation, one gets the incentive for *para-vairāgya* and merges in the Atman. Then the person says to himself that he has had enough of this world; so he says, let me merge in my true original nature.

*Jātismaratva*, again, is evidence of the

*(Continued on page 391)*

# The Wonder That Is Ramakrishna Mission*

SWAMI PURNATMANANDA

*In this illuminating article, Swami Purnatmananda, Editor of the Bengali monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order,* Udbodhan, *highlights the uniqueness in the features of the Ramakrishna Mission. Besides stating the circumstances relating to the founding of the Mission and the ideology behind the Mission's works performed in the spirit of worship, the learned author, briefly but with emphasis, points out that the advent of Sri Ramakrishna has opened a new path for the embodied being to reach the goal of human life. This path is no more 'strait' but broad enough to accommodate men and women of varying taste and temperament.*

It all began with a profound utterance. Sometime in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna, perfectly hale and hearty, was seated in his room at Dakshineswar and talking to the devotees assembled there, among whom was also young Narendranath — Swami Vivekananda of later years. Sri Ramakrishna discussing various spiritual topics, spoke thus about the tenets of Vaishnava religion: 'That [Vaishnava] doctrine teaches one that one should always be careful to observe three things, viz., a taste for God's name *[name ruchi]*, kindness to all beings *[jive daya]*, and the worship of Vaishnavas *[vaishnavapujan].*'[1] Then he went on to elaborate the three principles one by one. As soon as he uttered the words 'compassion for all beings', he suddenly went into ecstasy. After some time he came back to semi-normal consciousness and began to mutter: 'Compassion for all beings — compassion for all beings? Never! Insignificant creature that you are, how dare you bestow compassion on others? Who are you to bestow compassion? No, no; not compassion for jivas, but service to jivas as Shiva.'[2]

Everyone listened to those words of Sri Ramakrishna, but none could comprehend their deep import. It was Narendranath alone who caught the significance and, on coming out of the room after Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy was over, said, 'Ah! What a wonderful light have I got today from the Master's words! What a simple, attractive and charming light he threw by effecting a synthesis of devotion and Vedantic knowledge which is generally regarded as dry, hard and callous! What the Master uttered today in ecstasy, makes it clear that the Vedanta of the forest can be brought to the very household, it can be used in every work of the world. If God ever grants me an opportunity, I'll proclaim everywhere this wonderful truth I have heard today. I will preach this truth to the learned and the ignorant, to the rich and the poor, to the Brahmin and the pariah.'[3]

Therefore, the birth of the Ramakrishna Mission, in the spiritual and ideological

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* Enlarged version of the address delivered at Balaram Mandir on 1 May 1997 at the inaugural celebration of the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission.

1. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 817. [Hereafter, *Great Master.*]
2. Cf. Swami Gambhirananda, *Yuganayak Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1991), vol. 1, p. 118. [Hereafter, *Yuganayak.*]
3. Cf. *Great Master,* pp. 817-18.

sense, dates back to some day in 1884. Its genesis was involved in that profound utterance of Sri Ramakrishna and it was left to the wonderful genius of Swami Vivekananda, then Narendranath, to discover immediately the tremendous significance embedded in it and to give it concrete form later, in the shape of a unique monastic organization known as the 'Ramakrishna Mission'.

It is unique because it has no parallel in the entire gamut of Hindu monasticism. It is unique in the history of monastic organizations in the world because, although a monastic organization today in the sense of leadership, it included, when it was formally inaugurated, householder devotees also as its key administrative office-bearers. The Secretary and the Under-Secretaries of the Mission were householders while the General President and the President and Vice-President of its Calcutta centre were monks.[4] The system, however, could not continue for long because of the lack of the desired participation by the householders. But the idea is still alive in a symbolic form in the General Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, which is composed of both monastics and householders.

It is unique because it looks upon women with supreme veneration and works for the uplift of women from the tragic predicament they have been placed in by the man-dominated society over the centuries. Its uniqueness lies in its sustained and systematic efforts to build schools for girls and hospitals for pregnant mothers, and last but not the least an exclusive organization for nuns without a sprinkling of interference by monks. This is an instance which provides a singular exception compared to any monastic organization in the world — Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian.

It is unique because of its magnificent equation of work and worship, because of its elimination of every distinction between the 'sacred and the secular', to quote the beautiful expression of Sister Nivedita. The idea of service, however, was long in practice in the Christian monastic organizations, but there, it cannot be denied that it had been directly or indirectly associated with the work of proselytization. Ramakrishna Mission abhors the idea of conversion. It advocates the principle of unity of religions and harmony of faiths; it not only believes in tolerance , but in acceptance also. It believes in the freedom of an individual to chose religion and, therefore, it considers the act of conversion a crime and exploitation when it is forced upon somebody by taking advantage of his/her poverty and illiteracy. It is unique because of its bold and consistent stand against all sorts of communalism, fundamentalism and sectarianism.

The Ramakrishna Mission is unique because it decries mystery-mongering and the so-called super-naturalism. It exhorts people to act according to reason and never to get swayed over by sheer sentimentalism or any dose of morbidity in the guise of devotion. Thus the Mission is a clear anti-thesis of the so-called religiosity in the name of religion.

In this way, the Mission attempts to project a concept and practice of a scientific and universal religion devoid of all religious superstitions and parochialism, and aspires to bridge the so-called gap between religion

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4. The first office-bearers of the Ramakrishna Mission formed at Balaram Mandir on 1 May 1897 were: Swami Vivekananda (General President), Swami Brahmananda (President, Calcutta Centre), Swami Yogananda (Vice-President, Calcutta Centre), Narendra Nath Mitra (Secretary), Dr. Shashi Bhushan Ghosh and Sharat Chandra Sarkar (Under-Secretaries). Sharat Chandra Chakravarty was the Reader of Scriptures.

and science. In fact, the central notes of the ideal of the Ramakrishna Mission are harmony and universality.

It is unique because of its tremendous message of the divinity of man and its wonderful gospel of social commitment of monasticism, its deep concern for the masses, especially women, for the afflicted, for the poor, for the downtrodden — for humanity in general.

Historically speaking, the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on1 May 1897. However, formal foundation was only the inevitable sequel to the great legacy of the illustrious life and vibrant message of Sri Ramakrishna bequeathed to the chief among his disciples at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur Bati and Cossipore Garden-House during his penultimate years in this world. But when Swami Vivekananda, the prophet of the new age, founded the Ramakrishna Mission just a century ago on 1 May 1897 uniting the social commitment to the spiritual culture of mankind, many eyebrows were raised. This 'many' included not only outsiders and the conservative elites of the city, but also some of his own brother-disciples. They mistakenly thought that Swami Vivekananda was deviating from established norms, patterns and concepts of traditional monasticism. The dissident brother-disciples found in his actions a marked straying away from the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and an evident influence of Western culture. However, Swami Vivekananda was indomitable, being fully convinced that he was only attempting to translate the new and bold gospel of his Master into a concrete form, which was in absolute conformity with Indian tradition and the message of Vedanta. He was not, however, alone in this conviction. There were several of his brother-disciples who shared his conviction and supported him without the slightest of doubts and misgivings. Above all there was Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi — the Divine Consort of Sri Ramakrishna — who time and again expressed in the most categorical terms that Swami Vivekananda was truly an instrument in the hands of the Master and that whatever he spoke or did were never his words or acts, but were all Sri Ramakrishna's and Sri Ramakrishna's only. Unfortunately, those who did not agree with him could not decipher the writing of Providence on the wall of time. People had frowned at Buddha and Christ also, but time proved that Buddha and Christ were infallible. The last one hundred years, though a tiny period of time compared to many hundreds of years associated with Buddha and Christ, speak volumes in testimony of the fact that Vivekananda is also infallible. The dissidents, alas, could not know that before them stood a new Buddha, a new Christ! Today, historians, philosophers and social scientists admit that by founding the Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda not only extended the limits of monasticism and religion, but opened up new dimensions also. He gave a new consciousness to monasticism and religion — infused new life into both as it were. He established monasticism on its true ideal and added to it new dimensions, new significance, new ideas, new expansion, new depth and new mobility. Dry, hard monasticism turned poetic at his touch.

Throughout its long tradition, Hindu monasticism had proved itself to be utterly callous to society and the people at large. The tradition of Hindu monasticism never admitted any commitment either to society or to the people. God-realization or self-liberation was its only ideal and God was the centre of its spiritual endeavours and aspirations. The sannyasi used to shut himself up in a secluded cave of a mountain or a cottage in a forest and spend his days and nights in the contemplation of God or Self. Society and people provided him with food,

clothing and sustenance. But he never cared to feel any concern for them, rather he remained content with his majestic aloofness from society and people. At various times Swami Vivekananda said to this effect: Ochre robe is not meant for self-liberation only. It is meant for self-expansion, for self-sacrifice also. Ochre robe is a flag for great work. The sannyasi must get ready for giving his everything for the good of the world. He has to dedicate himself wholly for the good of humanity. The sannyasi is born for the good of the many, for the benefit of the many. Fie on him who after taking the vows of sannyasa forgets this great ideal. His life is useless, his sannyasa is futile.

Vivekananda placed before the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission a twin motto: *Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha* — for one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world. This motto, a novel motto indeed, became the war-song of his new movement. What he did thereby was unique in the history of monasticism — building a bridge between the ancient and the modern ideals. He kept intact the age-old ideal of monasticism, viz., the ideal of self-liberation, but added to it at the same time the ideal of humanism, the ideal of doing public good. He never shifted the position of God from the centre of the monk's spiritual endeavours and aspirations, he only gave a new name for Him — 'Man'. He equated Man with God and thus God exchanged His position with Man as the object of worship. The 'mission' of the Ramakrishna Mission as set by Swami Vivekananda was to 'evolve a god out of the material man'.[5] The 'mission' was nothing but the 'mission' of Vedanta. Hence Swami Vivekananda termed his new mission as 'Practical Vedanta'. Swami Brahmananda described the advent of Sri Ramakrishna as signifying the building of 'a bridge between the plane of the jivas and that of Shiva'[6] which he declared was a new contribution by Sri Ramakrishna to the world. The Mission as well as the Math are instruments through which these lofty goals are being realized in the lives of many fortunate souls.

Swami Vivekananda, in doing so, harmonized the ideals of Bhagavan Buddha and Acharya Shankara, which were definitely great in their own places and served the need of their ages. Buddha came with the great message of love. He called upon his follower-monks to dedicate themselves to the task of the amelioration of human suffering. He said: *'Charatha bhikshave bahujanahitaya, bahujanasukhaya, lokanukampaya* — Monks! you speed forth for the good of the many, for the comfort of the many and with your heart filled with the milk of compassion for the people'. He thus gave utmost emphasis on public good and welfare of humanity as the motto of monasticism. Buddha never talked of God-realization or Self-realization, for, he never admitted the existence of God or Self. Therefore, in Buddha's motto of monasticism there was no place for God-realization or Self-realization. In fact, it was absolutely ignored by Buddha, but he gave the idea of selfless work for emancipation.

Sri Shankara on the other hand came with his great gospel of Self-realization or the realization of the Supreme Spirit and ignored the ideal of public good and welfare of humanity or society. To him this world or society or man had only *vyāvahārika sattā* (empirical reality) but no *pāramārthika sattā* (ultimate reality) since it was mere appearance. He admitted the ideal of realization of the Self or God as the only object to be

5. Cf. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 4, p. 314; vol. 5, p. 409. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*.]

6. Swami Nirvanananda, *Devaloker Kathā* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1997), p. 77.

achieved by a monk through the path of discrimination, knowledge and contemplation. In Shankara's motto, therefore, the ideal of welfare of man, of the amelioration of the physical suffering of man did not find any place at all.

Swami Vivekananda harmonized both these great ideals and gave his new motto for monasticism to the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission: *Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*. He took *jagaddhita* (welfare of the world) from Buddha and *atmamoksha* (liberation of the self) from Shankara. To these great ideals he added the ideal of the worshipful devotion of Sri Chaitanya and thus mingled karma with jnana, yoga and bhakti. But this wonderful harmonization was the discovery of his great Master who said: 'The goal of life is the attainment of God';[7] 'The path of devotion prescribed by Narada is best for this age';[8] 'If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also?';[9] 'You meditate on God by closing your eyes, can't you meditate with eyes open?'[10] In fact, the concept was given in its genesis in all these utterances. But others, including 'M', the illustrious recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* could not make out what a tremendous message Sri Ramakrishna was actually delivering through these very simple utterances. It was reserved for Narendranath to discover their real import. One incident has already been referred to. But there were at least two other incidents which we narrate below:[11]

It was 3 January 1886. Sri Ramakrishna was at the Cossipore Garden-House. Narendra said to him in a somewhat complaining tone: 'All the others had their realization [on 1 January 1886]; please give me something. All have succeeded; shall I alone remain unsatisfied?' Sri Ramakrishna asked: 'What do you want?' Narendra replied: 'It is my desire to remain absorbed in samadhi continually for three or four days, only once in a while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food.' As soon as Narendra completed his sentence, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'So small-minded you are! There is a state higher than that even. "All that exists art Thou" — it is you who sing that song.' On a second occasion close to the one referred to, Narendra again beseeched the Master for Nirvikalpa samadhi. The Master asked him calmly: 'Well, what do you want?' Narendra said: 'I want to get absolutely merged in samadhi like Shukadeva for five-six days at a stretch after which I will however come down a little for the maintenance of the body to get merged again in samadhi.' Sri Ramakrishna gave him at once a sharp rebuff: 'Fie upon you! Such a great soul you are and yet you utter such small words! I thought you would become a huge banyan tree under whose shade thousands of people would find their shelter, and you are craving for your own liberation only! This is an utterly trivial and mean expression! No, no, my boy, don't make your outlook so small and low!' To his great surprise Narendra heard these words. So long he knew that the state of Nirvikalpa samadhi was the highest state of realization according to the scriptures and saints of Hinduism and there was nothing beyond that to achieve or to aspire for by a spiritual aspirant. Now he learnt from his Master that there was another state even higher than Nirvikalpa samadhi, and to crave for one's own liberation only was as hateful as absolute selfishness!

Narendra's intellect got stirred and his emotion was kindled by the flames of those

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7. Swami Nikhilananda (Tr.), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), p. 453.
8. Ibid., p. 175.
9. Ibid., p. 405.
10. Cf. *Yuganayak*, vol. 1, p. 151.
11. Cf. Ibid., pp. 150-1.

profound words. He realized that with those words and with that great ideal, Sri Ramakrishna was actually harmonizing monasticism and society, the ancient ideal and the modern ideal. He was humanizing the established ideal of monasticism infusing into it concern for society — the essence of humanism. He thus opened the thoroughfare of 'Sevayoga' in the history of religion and spirituality. Therefore when Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission he only gave a concrete shape to the new gospel of his Master till then unknown to many of Sri Ramakrishna's lay as well as monastic disciples.

Ramakrishna Mission is even today looked upon by many as a social service institution. But this is absolutely wrong. It is no doubt dedicated to the service of man in society, but it is never a so-called social service institution. It is fundamentally, principally and thoroughly a spiritual organization which admits social commitment as part and parcel of the spiritual discipline of its members. Social service is its vital commitment, but here it has been sublimated into a spiritual commitment. Service to man has been uplifted here to the status of the worship of God. Work has been turned into as good and effective means to realize God as worship and meditation. The secular has thus been equated with the sacred, work with worship. This is the basic principle which the Ramakrishna Mission has applied in all its endeavours and activities and this has worked wonders. The Mission in this way has presented a new ideal and philosophy of work and a new model of religion to mankind.

Service to man was definitely an integral part of Buddha's ideal of monasticism. We are familiar with the anecdote of Vasavadatta, the courtesan, and Upagupta, the Buddhist monk, and Upagupta's remarkable nursing of Vasavadatta while she was abandoned in the outskirts of the city because of her infectious disease. Service here was wonderful; it was an act of spiritual discipline also. But it was never equated with the spirit in which Buddha was venerated by a Buddhist monk. The ideal is quite different in the case of a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission. We may mention here the example of Swami Sadananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who used to suck the sores of the lepers to bring them comfort and relieve their pain. Mention must be made of Swami Akhandananda, a brother-disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who used to bathe the orphan boys of his Home with his own hands chanting the *Purushasukta*, the *snana-mantra* of Narayana, the Supreme God. There was no difference in the quality of service offered by the children of Buddha and the children of Ramakrishna, but the difference was in the attitude and spirit with which it was offered. Bhikshu Upagupta was serving a prostitute who was left abandoned and destitute with all care and affection and also with deep spiritual fervour. But he was not serving his Buddha in her. But Swami Sadananda and Swami Akhandananda were filled with the impulse that they were serving Ramakrishna, their God, in the lepers and in the orphan boys. Here worship, worshipper and worshipped melted into one, losing their individual identities.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'An empty stomach is no good for religion.'[12] What Sri Ramakrishna meant by this was the provision for *anna*, i.e., food, clothing, shelter and health were essential and urgent not only for the physical well-being of man, but for his mental and spiritual development also. By this he admitted the four needs of man — food, clothing and shelter *(anna)*, health and hygiene *(prana)*, education *(vidya)*, and religion *(dharma)* — to be more

12. *Complete Works*, vol. 6, p. 254.

specific, spirituality. In other words Sri Ramakrishna aimed to strike a balance between the material development, vital energy, mental and intellectual development and spiritual development of man. He thus harmoniously dealt with the hunger of the body, of the bio-mechanism, of the mind and of the spirit. Swami Vivekananda got this concept of the unfoldment of a total man from his Master and attempted to give it a practical application through the Ramakrishna Mission which advocates the advancement of science and technology, spread of secular and professional education and conducting of medical, relief and charitable projects on the one hand, and the spread and inculcation of the moral and spiritual values on the other.

Hence, Ramakrishna Mission is not just a religious organization, but far beyond it. It is a movement — an all-comprehensive-movement. It is a movement for forming a new social order, for making a new and healthy type of man, for building a new world to live in. Over the last one hundred years, Ramakrishna Mission has been playing directly or indirectly the role of a pioneer in the fields of general education, women's education, mass education, mass organization, rural development, slum development, independent employment projects for poor men and women in the rural and urban areas, and last but not the least in the field of relief operation in times of natural calamities and disasters like fire, flood, drought, famine, earth-quake, etc.

Today Ramakrishna Mission completes a full hundred years of its existence and service to humanity. It is now a fundamental part of modern history whether it is accepted universally at the moment or not. Time alone will prove how it became history itself on its own merit, and what connection with and impact on the great upheavals in Russia and China and India's struggle for and achievement of independence, it had.

The principal and central source of inspiration behind the Ramakrishna Mission is obviously Sri Ramakrishna himself whose name it bears. But its chief sustainer and nourisher is the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and its premier architect is Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna wished his beloved 'Naren' would emerge as a huge banyan tree to shelter humanity at large and spread his infinitely wide shade of comfort and solace over all who were torn and tossed under the sun and storm of life's battle. Ramakrishna Mission is that infinitely all-encompassing and soothing shade of the banyan tree that is Swami Vivekananda. Nay, Ramakrishna Mission is the dream-come-true epic of Sri Ramakrishna as well as of Swami Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna Mission is moving ahead on its march into the future making its own way and uniting at the same time the ancient on the one hand and the modern on the other, the past on the one hand and the future on the other. It may be said borrowing the beautiful words of Sister Nivedita that the Ramakrishna Mission is 'the last of an old order' and simultaneously 'the beginning of a new'. In that new epoch of civilization Ramakrishna Mission is dedicated and destined to lead the whole human race to the confluence of eternal freedom and universal unity breaking the barriers of caste, colour, country and creed. ❐

*Be strong and stand up and seek the God of Love. This is the highest strength. What power is higher than the power of purity? ... This love of God cannot be reached by the weak; therefore be not weak, either physically, mentally, morally, or spiritually.*

—Swami Vivekananda

Centenary
Ramakrishna Mission
Concluding Function

# All-India Youth Convention
# 3 and 4 February 1998

## A REPORT BY SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

It was raining heavily. A bird was searching hither and thither for a shelter. It flew there, but was driven out. It next flew to another place, but was not satisfied. At last, it turned back. Its destiny now was its own sweet home. The nest it had thought was dilapidated, was its target now. And when it reached there, what a relief! The nest, which was its home all through, was a perfect protection to it from rain! It became so happy at last.

This was the feeling thousands of young men and women had in attending the Belur Math Youth Convention. They are a sample of the rest of the Indian youth, one felt. With all the fun that is going on all over the world, with all the imitations we are trying to be adepts at, something appears to be wrong — seriously wrong! 'All that glitters is not gold,' is an old saying. Probably, that is what today's search for values tells us time and again.

Anyway, Belur Math saw about 10,000 youths from all parts of the country on the 3rd and 4th February. The Youth Convention had been arranged as part of the centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission. This was the penultimate item in the year-long programme.

It is not as easy as one may imagine to make arrangements for such a convention in Calcutta. Many hurdles have to be crossed over. Accommodation is one big problem. Another problem is fixing the date of the Convention. February is exam-fever time in India. Such problems notwithstanding, the Convention was a success. This shows the power of Swamiji's thought. At least 2,300 young men stayed for these two days at the Saradapitha of Belur Math. The rest of the outstation delegates were accommodated at Yuva Bharati Stadium, Salt Lake, Calcutta.

*3 February 1998*

The Convention began with Vedic Chanting by the students of the **Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math**. That was followed by the Welcome Address by **Srimat Swami Smarananandaji**, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission. Smarananandaji spoke about the year-long celebrations held at various places. He said that the organization which began with Sri Ramakrishna's initiative has become a huge organization spread throughout the world. However, much more needs to be done. Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, along with the Holy Mother, have given something precious to the world. The message has not yet reached the world's remote areas. It is the responsibility of each one of us to mould our lives by following noble ideals and help others to do likewise. Thus, Smarananandaji welcomed not only the youth assembled at the conference but also the youth of India in general to dedicate themselves to the cause of rebuilding our nation.

The next item on the programme was benediction. **Most Revered Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj**, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, had kindly consented to deliver the Benedictory Address. He began by thanking the youth for having responded to the call of Swamiji and come to the conference in spite of their ensuing examinations. He reminded the younger generation that Swami Vivekananda had high hopes in them and that the world would be revolutionized by the youth. The revolution, however, was not any political revolution. It was the cultural, moral and spiritual revolutions that were needed, Revered Maharaj said. He also said that the youth have a great responsibility in bringing about the much-needed change in India. Just as a torn map was set right by a child by placing properly the torn parts of the picture of the man on the other side of the map, the nation also can be set right if individuals are set right. For this to happen, the young should be strong in character. Revered Maharaj asked, 'How to develop character?' and answered his question in this manner: 'Each one of you must first of all give up negative thinking.... Have immense faith in your potential qualities. Forget all the past mistakes.... Secondly, try to be as selfless as possible.' He fervently told the youth not to make Swamiji's advent go in vain for them. He called upon the youth to work for the good of the country in particular and of the world at large.

After this inspiring benediction, the Youth Convention was inaugurated by **Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj**, the senior Vice-

President of the Ramakrishna Mission. Delivering the Inaugural Address in his usual marvellous style, Revered Maharaj inspired the youth to read the works of Swami Vivekananda, specially his *Letters* and *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. These two books had inspired almost all the important leaders of the freedom movement during the pre-independent days. Gandhiji, Nehru and a galaxy of others vouched their work to Swamiji's words. He spoke further about the deterioration in almost every field during the last fifty years though we got the much-coveted independence. The reason for such a downward trend is a lack of orientation. The orientation should come from no other quarter than Swamiji's works, because such a great leader as Swamiji was not born anywhere else. Swamiji's thoughts are like bombs. They will burst and destroy all vices. A new character frame has to be set up for the good of the world at large. This has to be done at the individual level by self-development, and at the collective level by spreading the message of Vedanta. We have both the capacity to do good and to do evil. Let us choose the path of good.

After Swami Ranganathanandaji inaugurated the Convention, a message in Bengali from **Srimat Swami Gahanananandaji Maharaj**, a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission, was read out. He reminded the youth of the sacrifices made by Swamiji within his short span of life for the cause of Vedanta and for the good of the world.

The last speaker of the morning session was the presenter of the Keynote Address, **Professor Muchkund Dubey**. Prof. Dubey gave a personal touch to his speech by narrating his association with the Ramakrishna Mission since his days at Dhaka, Bangladesh. He called upon the youth to follow the teachings of Swamiji for their own benefit. He said that Swami Vivekananda had a vision for India. He envisioned a nation which would have all that is good and great — the rejuvenation of the ancient glorious India was what Swamiji meant. We as a nation have betrayed Swamiji's expectations. There is despair, callousness, and so on, all around. Standards have disappeared in life. It is for the young to change the state of affairs. The youth are pure and still have the innocence. If Archimedes had been given a place to stand, he would have moved the world! Even so, if Swamiji had been given one hundred young men and women, he would have transformed the world. He would have revolutionized the whole world. Therefore, the young have to come forward and dedicate themselves to the noble task of nation-building and character-building activities. In the drive for character development, these are the three principles to be adhered to: (1) feeling for the poor and the downtrodden, (2) motivation to work for others, and (3) renunciation. Mr. Dubey concluded his speech with a *mantra* from the famous *Isha Upanishad*.

The vote of thanks was tendered by **Swami Ramanandaji Maharaj**, the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, since Swami Lokeswaranandaji Maharaj, Convener of the Convention, could not make it owing to illness. An uplifting bhajan by **Swami Sarvaganandaji** brought the morning session to a close.

In the second session **Swami Tyaganandaji**, the former Editor of *Vedanta Kesari*, delivered the Keynote Address. His talk simply charmed the youth. Quoting Bernard Shaw, he said that youth is a wonderful thing and should not be wasted. How to make this grand gift fruitful? By following the teachings of Swamiji. Swamiji went to the West in order to preach Vedanta there. His mission then, was therefore the spiritual regeneration of the West. Apart from understanding the principles of Vedanta, the West also learnt that India was not a heathen country as thought by them for centuries. On the other hand, in India itself, Swamiji, who received a grand ovation upon his return to India from the West, awakened us to our cultural and spiritual heritage. He woke us up from our slumber, so to say.

Tyaganandaji continued, saying that we have to ask ourselves after fifty years of independence: How free have we become? It is time to study the awakening Swamiji produced in India. We have followed Swamiji's mandate all these years only selectively. If not, how else to explain all the inequalities in every other field, Tyaganandaji asked. Patriotism gets reduced to narrow exclusivistic nationalism if freedom is not understood properly. We should understand things in proper perspective, Tyaganandaji asserted. He asked, 'How many of us have read Swami Vivekananda and understood him in the right perspective? How many of us have thought about our life and its goals?' He concluded by saying that the process of awakening which Swamiji started must be continued for our own benefit.

Tyaganandaji told the youth that they may by all means continue with their career building urges; but, they should adhere to the principle of holding on to great and noble ideals. If Swamiji wanted a hundred youths to revolutionize the world, the 10,000 odd present at the Convention would revolutionize a million such worlds, he said.

Tyaganandaji thus set the ball rolling by beautifully introducing the subject of the session:

'Swami Vivekananda's Return from the West and India's Awakening.'

There were four speakers in the panel. The first to speak was **Sri Sayantan Das** in Bengali. He said that in pre-independent days, there was badly felt the need of a leader to bring sunken India out of its pathetic condition. It was then that Swamiji arrived on the scene. He wanted the combination of the best features of the East and the West to bring about a remodelling of the world. There is no dispute so far as Swamiji's role in the reawakening of India is concerned, Sri Sayantan asserted.

**Ms. Sucheta Sharma** of New Delhi began by saying that Swamiji was not a Himalayan sadhu, sitting in caves away from human habitation. He was very much amongst us and worked for us tirelessly. He rejuvenated the ancient dharma. The ovation that he received upon his return to India was unique in the annals of history, Miss Sucheta added. She quoted a few exhortations of Swamiji aimed at kindling patriotism and the principles he said were necessary to become a true lover of humanity.

The Secretary of the Educational Wing of Vivekananda Kendra, **Kumari Nivedita**, spoke next. She said, 'Two things are impressed upon us since Swamiji's advent: (1) The world wants India to survive, on account of the universal need of spiritual ideas; (2) India has to prepare herself in order to be able to give spiritual ideas to others.' India has a philosophy, a spiritual methodology, which can go hand in hand with science. This is its great plus point. Now, this lofty ideal cannot be given by conveying ideas merely through words; a blazing life is needed. How can India prepare herself? The first thing needed is self-confidence. Swamiji therefore exhorted that we have to work. Work brings self-confidence in its train. The awakening and falling back to sleep that we see in India need not cause much worry; for, it is like a spiral. The present rejuvenation will send shock waves round the globe. Kum. Nivedita seemed to be so sure about this awakening!

**Mr. K.K. Chopra**, a management consultant of New Delhi, spoke in Hindi next. He spoke about the ideals of *tyaga* and *seva*. Instead of offering just flower garlands to Swamiji, we have to give a garland of our lives to him. Frothy talk and a bit of superficial social service won't do. We have to dedicate ourselves heart and soul. Mr. Chopra further said that such dedication alone will count towards India's future progress.

The Chairman's Address was delivered next. The eminent **Professor Sheik Ali,** who has founded the two universities of Goa and Mangalore, thanked the Mission for having given him the opportunity to speak at the Convention. Explaining what Swamiji taught, he said that truth is God and God is truth. Truth again, is knowledge. This knowledge is not mere secular knowledge, obtained from tests and experiments; it is the spiritual knowledge that comes from supersensuous experience. Love is another principle which has to be cultivated since it comes from the Divine. Aristocracy of interaction and sublimity of the soul should go hand in hand. Freedom from ignorance is actual freedom. Beyond this mundane world there is a world of peace and joy. That world can be the habitat of only those who carry the casket of their soul in pristine purity.

This concluded the morning programme of the first day of the Youth Convention.

In the afternoon, after the young boys and girls had taken sumptuous meals, there was an entertainment programme from the boys of the **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur,** Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh. It was followed by a cultural programme from the students of the **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore.**

The final session of the day had this theme: 'The Youth at Crossroads: How Swami Vivekananda Can Help Them'. The eminent management expert of India, **Dr. Subir Chowdhury,** chaired the session. The remarkable feature of this session was that **Swami Atmapriyanandaji,** Principal of the Vidyamandira — the Mission's degree college at Belur Math — did an excellent job as moderator, adding to the beauty of the session.

**Dr. Subir Choudhury** began by giving the statistics pertaining to our country's present state of affairs. His statistics showed clearly the sad state our country is in, even today — fifty years after independence.

The first speaker, **Sri Gautam** of Bangalore, said: Adolescence is a transition from dependence to self-sufficiency. It is a stage when questions about morality and ethics have paramount status. Swamiji's ideas about morality are best suited to help modern youth. There is an identity crisis today among the youth. The ideal for the youth is Swamiji's mandate: Be and Make.

The next speaker was **Sri Swarnabindu Banerjee**, who said that Swami Vivekananda himself did not want to be idolized. However, we are trying to do just that! He wanted the youth in particular and people in general to hold themselves as their own ideal. Each one of us has an individuality of his own. There must be no imitation. However, we must follow the great teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda which appeal to us and

mould our lives accordingly. The best of Swamiji's teachings, according to the speaker, is that serving humanity selflessly leads one to perfection.

**Mr. Priya Ranjan Jha** of Patna spoke in Hindi. He asked a pertinent question: If according to the chairman the situation in India is as bad as it seems through statistics, who is responsible? Is it not the elders of today, who have done wrong things in the past adopting wrong policies? The problem before us is appalling and we have to work. How and in what way? Swami Vivekananda is the way, he said.

A delegate from Orissa, **Sri Shashanka Shekhar Grahacharya**, said that we have to give up being cynical. Avoiding negative thinking we must take up the positive and inspiring ideals of Swamiji and follow them in life.

**Sri Shuddhasattwa Das** of Calcutta asked: How will Swamiji's ideas solve our present problems? Swamiji's ideal of education is the answer. This education will bring the perfection that is needed. No problem in life can be solved unless this perfection, which is latent, is roused to self-conscious activity.

**Ms. Priti Verma** of Delhi said that the choice before the youth is open. We are at a crossroads. Modern way of life poses innumerable problems before us. We have to choose the best path and the best one is, without a shadow of doubt, that shown by Swami Vivekananda, she asserted.

**Ms. Neha Desai** of Rajkot was the next speaker. She gave a positive note to the proceedings by saying that we are all not that bad; it is working like an automaton — the mechanical way of life — which has harmed us. This mechanization of life comes from following the Western style. We Indians are originally idealistic; we need original ideas. We need not compete with others to achieve excellence; let us compete with our own previous achievements. Our goals should be reflected in the work we do. So, the question is not of good or evil, but in the way of thinking. To choose to be the descendants of the monkey or of the sage Manu is up to us.

**Sri Srikumar** of Chennai had a few things to say about the way things are going on. Let us not think that Swamiji's India is the geographical India alone; it is the spiritual India which Swamiji adored. Even with regard to service, there is misconception. Let us all go beyond such wrong views, he said.

The last speaker, **Ms. Madhumita Ghosh** of Calcutta showed us that the youth of the world today are so helpless only because of a lack of guidance. Give them that, and they will shine.

In his concluding remarks, **Dr. Subir Choudhury** agreed that the situation is bad today because the earlier generations chose wrong ideals — only Western type of education, and so on — and so were at fault. Now, it is up to the younger generation to make things better. **Swami Atmapriyanandaji** made the session lively by giving flashes of comments and summarizing the views of each speaker.

The day ended with a beautiful Shiva Tandava dance, sponsored by the **Ramakrishna Math of Hyderabad**.

*4 February 1998*

The 4th of February began with the fourth session of the Youth Convention. After a melodious bhajan session by **Swami Divyavratanandaji** of Rajkot, 'The Powers of the Mind' was taken up for discussion. **Swami Muktinathanandaji** of Belur Math eloquently spoke about the powers of the mind according to Vedanta, Yoga and, in fact, he gave almost a total picture of what all the mind can do and achieve. He also spoke of psychology and of several ideas of psychologists about the capacity of the mind. He pointed out that there were four levels of functioning of the mind; it has five states according to Yoga; it has three *gunas* and can transcend these three to reach the fourth. He continued by saying that the impurities of the mind are nothing but various impulses and emotions. These can be controlled and sublated through discrimination.

After the above Keynote Address, **Sri J. Balakrishna** of Hyderabad said with a sorry note that we are as bad as we were about 5,000 years back, leading lives in frustration. We needed and we still need a messiah and Swamiji is that messiah. The mind — the greatest possession of man — needs proper cultivation by control of feelings and emotions. This has to be done through yoga. Attachment to higher ideals and detachment from lower emotions is the key to success.

**Mr. Sam Graci** of Canada remarked that the sons and daughters of the next millennium are looking up to us now — that is, to the philosophical ideals of India. What will we give them? Material gains, scientific gains, or the spiritual wonders? He said that the practice and following of Swamiji's ideals are the best answer to our difficulties.

The Chairman of the session, **Mr. A.B. Athreya**, is a doyen in the management field. He said that the mind has powers even as it has its own hazards. We have to carefully cultivate the mind. In the corporate sector as everywhere else, Mr. Athreya has been trying to instill the idea of working the Vedantic way. The interest in yogic methods is growing. This is because, everyone feels that through concentration and such other means, we can develop our minds to work in

greater capacity.

After tea, there was a **Question-Answer session**, conducted by three eminent monks of the Ramakrishna Order — **Swami Satyarupanandaji** of Raipur in Hindi, **Swami Purnatmanandaji** of Calcutta in Bengali and **Swami Nikhileswaranandaji** of Rajkot in English. There were over 600 questions in the question box, the Swamis said. They had to select a few to answer them. The questions ranged from how one has to continue in this world after the Convention to the meaning of the emblem of the Ramakrishna Order. Being adepts in solving youth problems, the three monks excellently answered the questions and won thunderous applause from the youth. Swami Satyarupanandaji spoke for some ten minutes about how the youth can improve their life-style, which was appreciated by one and all.

The post-lunch session was enlivened by the flute recital of **Sri Ronu Mazumdar**, who had some innovation for this particular Convention: he introduced *pakhawaj* as an accompaniment to flute. It is needless to add that his presentation was a grand success.

The final session of the two-day Youth Convention was chaired by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India (Retd.), **Sri J.S. Verma**. The Keynote Address was delivered by **Swami Gautamanandaji**, a senior Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and the President of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. The topic of the session was: 'Moral and Spiritual Values for the Youth'. The Swami said that the present -day problems before the youth are educational, social, economic, and so on. He stressed the value of moral and spiritual values so that all the problems can be tackled with these weapons.

When Swami Vivekananda arrived in India after his work in the West, the reception was exemplary: masses greeted him with enthusiasm and that was surprising. That the masses of India are essentially lovers of moral and spiritual values is what this shows. Spiritual illumination is the highest ideal of our country. For spiritual illumination, one has to have a deep yearning for God. And that comes from discrimination and renunciation. Discrimination simply means that we should know in our heart of hearts that there is a spiritual entity within. To go towards that and to give up petty desires is renunciation. We have to cultivate these four spiritual values: (1) faith in oneself, (2) purity, (3) spirit of sacrifice, and (4) honesty and truthfulness.

After the excellent Keynote Address, **Dr. H. Sudarshan**, winner of the Right Livelihood Award (the alternative Nobel Prize) for his service to tribals, spoke. He gave such alarming figures about the nation with a sprinkling of positive trends that one wondered what had gone wrong. With no sense of hygiene in rural areas, with fifty per cent of primary health centres not having even a microscope, and so on, the situation seemed very bad. The problem is not with money but is socio-political, Dr. Sudarshan added. The crisis in India is the crisis of values and to solve the crisis the Ramakrishna Mission must — as it is already doing — spread the ideas of Swamiji throughout the world.

**Sri Kaushik Mukherji** of Calcutta spoke of *yama* and *niyama* and a few other moral values needed for the society. **Ms. Sushma Singh** of Jamshedpur praised the work of the Ramakrishna Mission. She added that we have lost human values, and the work of the youth is to rebuild India by overcoming all drawbacks. Youth, Ms. Singh said, cannot be restricted by age. Old people bubbling with modern ideas can as well be considered young, while young minds with poor ideologies may be old. So, let us all work for the regeneration of India, she said.

**Swami Shuddharupanandaji** of Belur Math used a new style to inspire the youth. He chose the poetical language and also sang a little. He specially covered the four yogas and said that each yoga can be practised by everyone for personal uplift.

**Swami Suviranandaji** of Deoghar spoke in Bengali. He said that one has to listen to Swamiji's call and dedicate oneself to serve Swamiji's nation.

The Chairman, the **Hon'ble ex-Justice Sri J.S. Verma**, said that a strong value base is needed today. This value base was what led the freedom fighters to fight for our freedom. We must derive sustenance from the ideals of our country. In earlier days, it was not the practice to talk about honest people at all. Because, *that* was usual. Now, if there is an honest man here or there, the news is flashed! Even judges are praised if they are honest. How else can a judge be? The strength of morality and spirituality are never to be doubted. In fact, since there was proper training in such values in life, the speaker said that he could settle such problems as public accountability without much difficulty.

Mr. Verma further went on to say that it is the silent majority that is to blame for the evils. For, they are silent. The majority do nothing. They have something to do.

**Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj**, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, gave the Concluding Speech. He said he was so happy to see so many young

faces, eager to know about Swamiji. He recollected the proceedings of the two-day event one by one and said that here had been served a grand feast with no contra effect. Hold on to truth, for truth is Divine. Our national emblem has that as our motto, he added.

**Swami Shivamayanandaji**, an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, gave the vote of thanks.

The last event was a rendering of classical music by **Sri Rajan and Sajan Mishra**.

Before concluding this report, we make a special mention of the tireless service so many volunteers rendered day and night — at the Salt Lake stadium, at Saradapitha and at the Math. Among the volunteers there was one boy of the 5th standard who stood in all attention for hours at a stretch and served drinking water to the delegates. His enthusiasm was astounding.

The ball is now in the youths' court. They must emulate what they learnt at the Convention and put ideas into practice. Thus will the nation progress. ❐

# Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad

*(Continued from page 378)*

cycle of birth and death. It gives a message of hope and courage that even if I fail to reach the goal in this life, I will still prepare my ground for the next life so that in a life to come I will reach the goal. When the *jīva* realizes that he is not an individual self, but *Śiva, Paramātman*, then the fruit of all that he has done while ignorant of his original nature, which has not yet started bearing results (i.e., his *sañcita karma*) gets burnt by the fire of knowledge of the Atman. But the present body which is due to his *prārabdha karma* (the part of *karma* which has already started bearing results) will not drop dead. This body will carry on with the momentum which it still has. Though he exists in the world in a worldly sense, yet now he is established in the glory of *Ātma-svarūpa*. If his body-mind has been totally purified by *tapasya* to retain the experience of Atman, it will continue in that knowledge. He is now called a *jīvan-mukta*, free while living; still he does not feel superior to others, because his small individual ego is gone. Sri Ramakrishna used to point out that a piece of jute rope which can be used to tie even a ship, if burnt, looks intact like any other piece of rope but it no longer has the capacity to bind. Similarly, the stored (*sañcita*) *karmas* of an *Ātma-jñāni* are burnt out and no longer bind him, while the *prārabdha karma* which has caused his body runs out its full course. Types of *samādhis* are also mentioned out of which the aspirant does not come out. If the *sādhaka's* body is not adequately honed, it will burst like a mould under the pressure of molten metal. The experience of oneness with the universe is so deep that the body cannot retain the onrush of experience and it comes to an end. At the time of realization, the intensity of working out of *prārabdha karma* is so great that it will come to an end soon and the body may fall any time within twenty-one days.

*(to be continued)*

*Pratyagekarasaṁ pūrṇamanantaṁ sarvatomukham,*
*Ekamevādvayaṁ brahma neha nānāsti kiñcana.*

There is only one Brahman, One without a second, which is within all, homogeneous, infinite, endless, all-pervading. There is no duality whatsoever in It.

# The Role of Youth in National Regeneration

*Benedictory Address delivered at the Youth Convention*

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

*What follows is the text of the Benedictory Address of Most Revered Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Order, delivered at the Youth Convention on 3 February 1998. The Youth Convention (3 and 4 February 1998) and the Devotees' Convention (7 and 8 February 1998) formed the two parts of the concluding programme of the Centenary Celebrations of the Ramakrishna Mission.*

Friends,

It is a matter of joy to see you all assembled here to participate in the two-day Youth Convention, organized on the occasion of the concluding session of the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission on the holy grounds of the Belur Math. Even though most of you are busy, preparing for your ensuing examinations, you have responded to our call. I extend my hearty thanks to you all.

Swami Vivekananda had cherished high hopes in the younger generation. A few strong and sincere young persons can revolutionize the world, he used to say. The world is in need of a revolution today. I do not mean any political revolution, but it is the cultural and spiritual revolutions that are needed now.

Swamiji travelled throughout the whole of India and also through many countries in the West. He understood what the world wanted. India needed material upliftment, along with the rejuvenation of its ancient cultural and spiritual heritage, in order to regain her past glory. He saw, on the other hand, that with all its material advancement, the West needed a strong foundation of spiritual culture. Swamiji understood that neither of these constituents of growth can survive in isolation. According to him, a combination of science and spirituality was the panacea for all evils of the world. Therefore, soon after his triumphant return to India from the West, Swamiji established the Ramakrishna Mission for the *well-being of the many, for the benefit of the many*, to bring about the much needed change in world thought. The ideal of the Mission is to make efforts for not only upliftment of Indian masses, but the all-round well-being of all people of the world. A hundred years after the establishment of the Mission, we can say that some good work has been done; but a lot remains to be accomplished.

These days, much has been done to our ethical, cultural and spiritual fabric. Everywhere, there is downward trend in all fields. People are attracted by negative ideas in all avenues of growth. The youth are suffering greatly because of this deplorable situation prevailing everywhere. Due to constant invasion by weakening thoughts, the youth have lost all faith in themselves. Not only that; they have discarded the ancient glorious culture of the nation. Once a person loses faith in himself, his traditions and his culture, he is doomed. The tendency will

then be poor imitation of others. That is what is happening here now. Most of the youth are leading aimless lives.

That is why a revolution is needed. What is this revolution that Swami Vivekananda speaks of and how can this be brought about? By revolution, we do not mean that you should all fight with one another. Perhaps, you have all heard the story of a child who rearranged a torn map of India correctly, by properly placing together the picture of the man on the other side. When the man was set right, the map also became all right.So also, if the citizens of a country are great, the nation also will become great; because, a nation consists of individuals, and the stronger the individuals, the stronger will be the nation. Therefore, the youth must develop their character so that the nation is put on the right track.

How to develop character? Each one of you must first of all give up negative thinking. Stop thinking that you are weak and helpless. Have immense faith in your potential qualities. Forget all the past mistakes. Think always about the present condition and the future possibilities. This is the first important step.

Secondly, try to be as selfless as possible. Try to serve others around you wholeheartedly, with the idea that your country's future depends on all of them. Dedicating yourself for the service of others is the best way to serve yourself and the nation. This is the path Swamiji wanted our younger generation to choose for the upliftment of India.

Let not the advent of Swamiji go in vain for you. Pledge today that you will work for self-development along the lines shown by Swamiji. Within a very short time, you will see for yourself what a change has come upon you as well as in the society at large.

Swami Vivekananda calls upon each one of you to work for the good of the country in particular, and of the world at large. Please listen to this call and evolve yourselves along the path shown by him. I wish you all success in your endeavour.

May the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda be showered on you all, is my prayer to them.

I wish this Convention all success. Thank you. ❐

## EXHORTATION TO THE YOUTH OF INDIA-I

*SWAMI VIVEKANANDA*

*...my friends, my plan is to start institutions in India, to train our young men as preachers of the truths of our scriptures in India and outside India. Men, men, these are wanted: everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionized. ...Preach, preach unto the world the great truths of your religion; the world waits for them. For centuries people have been taught theories of degradation. They have been told that they are nothing. The masses have been told all over the world that they are not human beings. ...Let them hear of the Atman — that even the lowest of the low have the Atman within, which never dies and never is born — of Him whom the sword cannot pierce, nor the fire burn, nor the air dry — immortal, without beginning or end, the all-pure, omnipotent, and omnipresent Atman! ...Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth — anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating.*

Centenary
Ramakrishna Mission
Concluding Function

# All-India Devotees' Convention
# 7 and 8 February 1998

## A REPORT BY SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

There was a time when an advaitin would not think of sitting with a dvaitin. If at all the two sat together, it was for one to condemn the other! For centuries, the best brains of our country have dedicated themselves to condemning other philosophies. One group wrote one thing; the other group defended itself and tried to pull down the entire structure of the other. But the situation has vastly improved.

When we saw over 12,000 devotees assembled at the holy precincts of Belur Math, we felt that really Swami Vivekananda's ideology has taken root in many hearts. For, this was not a social get-together of people of various faiths and groups to merely sit and eat together. It was specifically a *devotees'* convention and the subjects discussed were philosophy, spirituality, religion, and so on. And here, the dvaitin as well as the advaitin — the bhakta, the karma-yogi, the jnana-yogi — all sat and enjoyed as well as participated in the proceedings. What does this signify? That the idea of religious harmony is slowly spreading roots in our country as elsewhere and that all internal differences are being slowly given up, is what this shows. This was indeed one of the central teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

The two-day Devotees' Convention was part of the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission. Held on 7 and 8 February 1998, the Convention drew the celebration of the Centenary to a close. Though the number of delegates had been restricted to 10,000, the devotees showed such eagerness to participate that the authorities had to raise the upper limit to 12,000 and more. From all parts of India, devotees poured into the holy precincts of Belur Math. About 3,500 out-station delegates were accommodated at the Yuva Bharati Stadium, Salt Lake, Calcutta. From there 50 buses brought them to Belur Math.

*7 February 1998*

The first session of the Convention began at 9 a.m. on the 7th, with Vedic Chanting by the brahmacharins of the **Probationers' Training Centre** at Belur Math. The brahmacharins wisely uttered *mantras* apt for the occasion. They said in Sanskrit that the world is pervaded by God and one has to renounce to enjoy. They also declared that God is the supreme goal of life, and sought peace to reign upon one and all. The atmosphere now became ready for the Convention, so to say.

**Swami Lokeswaranandaji Maharaj**, the Convener of the Centenary Celebrations, welcomed the gathering. He said that he was not satisfied just to call it a gathering of 'devotees'. It was not something like a coming together of strangers. The children of the Ramakrishna family were re-uniting after a long time. Whether one is a sadhu or a devotee, each belongs to the Ramakrishna family. And all have come together at such a holy place as the Belur Math where great ones like Swamis Brahmanandaji, Shivanandaji and others did intense *tapasya*, communed with God, as also enjoyed supreme bliss. Lokeswaranandaji said to the children of Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, that he felt blessed to be present on the occasion and hoped that the devotees felt that way too.

**Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj**, the venerable President of the Ramakrishna Mission, in giving his blessings, said that the devotees had gathered to celebrate the centenary of Sri Ramakrishna's mission on earth. This mission began when the Master started gathering a few devotees around him. This nucleus gradually grew into a huge tree and has spread all over the world now. Revered Maharaj said that it is difficult to understand Sri Ramakrishna, since he exhibited various aspects at different times. He is not ordinary at all. He is an epoch-making personality. Revered Maharaj also said that the participants had gathered to pay homage to Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. The Holy Mother was not separately mentioned, so said Revered Maharaj, because she is inseparably identified with Sri Ramakrishna.

With Sri Ramakrishna's advent, Revered Maharaj said, had begun a new era. It is the Satya Yuga. The evolution of mankind had already begun on the social, ethical, moral and spiritual planes. Who had envisaged when Sri Ramakrishna came on earth, that such an extraordinary thing will be happening? We have not yet fully understood the implications of Sri Ramakrishna, Maharaj regretted, and said that Sri

Ramakrishna is the new star in the spiritual firmament who represents all that is noble of the past and all the best possibilities of the future. Finally, Revered Maharaj wished the Convention all success.

The next item of the programme was reading out the message of **Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj**. In the message, the Vice-President of the Mission said that devotees, meaning householders, have a vital role to play in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. Side by side with our material advancement a lot of problems are arising also, and it is for all the devotees to counter these evil influences.

**Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj**, one of the three Vice-Presidents, gave the Inaugural Address. He inaugurated the Convention and gave the list of subjects that were to be discussed during the various sessions. He said that a devotee is one who is always absorbed in the Divine. This makes the lover imbibe the qualities of the Beloved. The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, true to the teachings of the *Gita*, have to be immersed in the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. It is not just voluntary contributions and services to a little extent that count. What is important is taking the spiritual ideal to heart. Whatever be the status of a devotee, he or she can lead a devoted life. Revered Maharaj added that wherever we might be — in the householder's life or in the monastery — all of us can lead exemplary lives.

The vote of thanks was proposed by **Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj**, the General Secretary. He said that in the Ramakrishna family, the father is Sri Ramakrishna, the mother Sri Sarada Devi, and the devotees of all nations and areas are brothers and sisters. All are welcome here. He thanked the hundreds of people who helped make the Convention a success.

The second session started with a melodious rendering of bhajan by **Swami Animeshanandaji. Swami Prabhanandaji** delivered the Keynote Address on the subject of the session: 'The Ramakrishna Ideal and the Ramakrishna Mission'. In his Keynote Address, Prabhanandaji reviewed the confusion prevalent in those early days about whether the ideas of Swamiji to found the Mission was indeed according to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. There were arguments — for and against — in those days and ultimately, everyone came to understand the truth of the oneness of Swamiji's and Sri Ramakrishna's ideals. He also said that the word 'Mission' connotes something different from the generally accepted concept that it advocates proselytization and so on. Far from it. The Ramakrishna Mission only advocates catholicity, he said. Prabhanandaji also talked about the days when Sri Ramakrishna attracted the best intellectuals of the day to him. All were charmed by his personality. Even later, well-known men like Isherwood wrote about him. Sri Ramakrishna performed twelve years of *sadhana* and learnt some truths which became the means for the betterment of the world. He made possible the humanly impossible task of harmonizing warring sects and religions. These days Sri Ramakrishna *the person* is also growing in popularity even as Sri Ramakrishna *the idea* is evolving. All this evolution owes to the Master's catholicity and breadth of vision, Prabhanandaji said.

**Prof. N.V.C. Swamy**, formerly Director of I.I.T., Chennai, spoke next. He said that human life is full of events and said that several incidents were behind the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission. Of them, some were: Sri Ramakrishna's correcting a devotee by saying that it is not compassion but service of jivas with the perception that they are manifestations of Shiva. The second was Narendranath's days of suffering after his father's death. The third was Swamiji's declaration that he wished to be born again and again to serve the only God he knew — the poor, the ignorant and the downtrodden. The fourth event that moulded the Ramakrishna Mission was Swamiji's tour of India and subsequent understanding of the new role monks had to play in the regeneration of the nation.

Prof. Swamy said that in our country, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga are possible these days because there are lots of yoga schools, temples and knowledgeable people around. What is lacking is karma-yogins. Selfless workers are very few. Otherwise, why would not the Ramakrishna Mission have thrived with thousands of people dedicating themselves to work for its lofty service ideal, he observed.

**Swami Purnatmanandaji**, the Editor of *Udbodhan* (the Bengali monthly journal of the Order), spoke almost along the same lines in Bengali. He said that Swamiji had said that he would revolutionize the monastic establishment, and he did it successfully. There were two silent doubts among the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna: Was not the Ramakrishna Mission against the principles that Sri Ramakrishna taught? Secondly, was not the ideal influenced by the West? All doubts were set at rest by Vivekananda. The Holy Mother too declared that the Ramakrishna Mission is fully in accord with the Ramakrishna ideal. In fact, many think that this ideal of monasticism was borrowed from Christianity. Though Swami Vivekananda honoured Christ greatly, his ideas were not directly adapted from Christianity. It was from the Buddhists and Krishna too,

that he got the idea, said Purnatmanandaji.

In his eloquent speech, **Swami Sridharanandaji** of Lucknow said that after a hundred years, the Ramakrishna Mission is growing steadily. It has two areas of functioning: (1) in the domain of concept and intellect, and (2) in the field of practical application. History has taught us what we have to do and what we have to avoid. One thing to remember is that the spiritual wealth of India had remained unutilized, and this had led to her downfall. Therefore, Swamiji founded the Mission and predicted that the glory which the nation would attain in the near future would surpass all previous excellences. It would make the Vedic period look pale, he said. Sri Ramakrishna had said that spirituality cannot be contained within geographical boundaries or psychological barriers. Everyone has access to spirituality. Thus, the philosophical aspect of the movement is: as many ways, so many paths. All can follow the spiritual path in different tracks but they will ultimately reach the same goal. One must not stop with conceptualization, one has to practicalize the high ideals in daily life.

**Sri Mahadeo Prasad Acharya**, a delegate from Bikaner, spoke in Hindi along almost the same lines. He said that Sri Ramakrishna came to preach universality. When Narendra accepted Kali, Ramakrishna was happy because Narendra's lop-sided development had been destroyed.

**Hon'ble Justice Venkatachaliah**, who is the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, gave the Chairman's Address. Sri Venkatachaliah praised the efforts of the Ramakrishna Mission in its serving the masses. He said that the ideal of the Master was bhakti according to Narada. He spoke about the anthropomorphic manifestation of God as the miserable, the destitute, and so on. Sri Venkatachaliah further said that there have been two tracks since time immemorial. One is *abhyudaya* and the other *nihsreyasa*. The Ramakrishna Mission is practising the ideas of Ramakrishna for the benefit of society.

The second session ended, and lunch packets were served to the delegates. After lunch break, a few devotional songs were rendered by **Sri Ram Kumar Chatterji** of Calcutta.

The evening session began with the Keynote Address of **Sri Palok Basu**, who is a Judge of the Hon'ble Allahabad High Court. He spoke about the subject of the session, which was the 'Role of Devotees in the Promotion of Ramakrishna Mission's Ideals'. He gave a picture of the Mission's humble beginnings and present development. He spoke a little emotionally about the various incidents of Swami Vivekananda's life, like when he was applauded for addressing the Americans using the expression: 'Sisters and Brothers'. He ended by saying that the people, specially devotees, appeared to be ailing. It was for monks to forcibly induce medicines to make them spiritually healthy.

**Swami Vishwanathanandaji** of Cherrapunji spoke in Bengali. He said that the devotees have played a vital role in the Ramakrishna Mission's development. Sri Ramakrishna's life is for the benefit of men and women in the three areas: The material, the mental and the spiritual. What is the role of devotees? The devotees should mould their lives according to Sri Ramakrishna's ideals. Sri Ramakrishna was one with a universal consciousness. He brought about the harmony of religions and of yogas. He gave the ideas, and Swamiji implemented those ideas. Swamiji's heart bled for the masses. It is for the devotees to imbibe this spirit.

**Dr. Lata Desai** of SEWA Rural, Gujarat, gave a brilliant lecture and thrilled the audience. She gave some seven ideas about how the devotees can work for the Ramakrishna Mission: (1) Let people in position take voluntary retirement and dedicate themselves for the cause of Swamiji. (2) The devotees should work in private centres where monks/nuns cannot go because of their being less in number. (3) Householders should encourage their children to stay with monks/nuns at least for some years and work for them. (4) There may be poor devotees who cannot do much. They have to work for Bhava Prachar. (5) When they give gifts to others, devotees may give devotional books. (6) There is a widening gulf between desired objectives and results attained. The reason is deficiency in character. Man-making is needed. We devotees ourselves should lead moral lives before teaching moral principles to our children, she said. (7) Let the devotees be role models to their children. Let parents encourage their children to take to monastic life.

**Swami Nikhilatmanandaji** of Allahabad spoke in Hindi. He proved himself to be a masterly speaker. He gave the analogy of *panchavati* and said that the Ramakrishna Mission is a *panchavati* (a group of five trees) and the waters that sustain it are Ganga (Sri Ramakrishna), Yamuna (Swamiji) and Saraswati (Mother Sarada Devi). The trees are: (1) God can be realized and God is a reality. (2) There are many paths to reach God. (3) Shiva is present in all beings; so one has to worship Shiva in jivas. (4) Respect for women and the ideal of motherhood. (5) Removal of all distinctions like caste, creed, and so on.

**Smt. Debjani Dasgupta** of Mumbai spoke next and said that the Ramakrishna Mission

started the moment Swamiji came to Sri Ramakrishna. She quoted some famous sayings of Swamiji.

The Chairman of the session, **Swami Bhaskaranandaji**, Head of our Centre at Seattle, spoke about how devotees can help monks. When there is a false accusation against the Mission, devotees need not be passive spectators. They can be active in their goodness. They must not, however, fight. Rather, they can contribute their mite by explaining things to people. For this, a daily paper may be started by devotees to share correct information. Secondly, let the devotees teach at least one poor boy or girl. Thirdly, let every devotee stop accepting dowry. There were some more ideas but he could not continue owing to shortage of time.

The day's events ended with a beautiful recital of sitar by **Sri Niladri Kumar**. Though a new name in the horizon of music, Sri Niladri gave a professional's touch and showed that even a young man can master his instrument. He no doubt pleased his listeners.

*8 February 1998*

The second day of the Devotees' Convention began with a song in Bengali. The Chairman of the session was **Dr. Karan Singh**. The Keynote Address was delivered by **Swami Jitatmanandaji** of Rajkot. Swami Jitatmanandaji asked, 'When do we go to seek the ideal?' and answered that when we are buffeted by life's problems and when death stares at us, we seek higher ideals. This higher ideal is immortality or God or Atman. And that again is called by different names by different peoples of the world. Now, this universal ideal, call it Allah or the Son of God or by any other expression, has been manifest in a special way in some special people on earth — for example, as Knowledge in Sankara, as Nirvana in Buddha. And all the different ideals which we can imagine were found blended in one life in Sri Ramakrishna. The uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna is his universality. There were no barriers at all. There is nothing destructive; everything is constructive in him. Sri Ramakrishna found the best representation of humanity in Swamiji — his Naren — and loved him dearly. This Narendra was to carry his message to the world. And then the Holy Mother, who at eighteen came to be worshipped as the Divine Mother — to be worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna himself — represents all that is good and noble. Swami Jitatmanandaji went on to say that one has to be earnest in realizing the truth. This is what Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda wanted of the devotees. Swamiji had declared that in the future, there would be so many Vivekanandas. Jitatmanandaji felt that the words of Swamiji can never go wrong.

Next **Swami Suhitanandaji**, an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, spoke in Bengali. Suhitanandaji recounted the various problems that devotees have to face in this world. For example, he told that problems come from areas like children, office work, and so on. In all areas, the one thing that is required is honesty and integrity. Suhitanandaji referred to three types of devotees. One type wants only material benefits. The second, the true devotee, wants realization. He or she does some good to others, but the main concern is realization. Then, there is yet another class. Devotees of this type want to be the servants of the Master. It is they who follow the ideal of 'service to mankind and liberation of Self' that Swamiji propounded. For, they progress spiritually taking others too with them. Suhitanandaji ended by saying that all those present are truly servants and devotees of the Master.

Dr. R.K. Naidu could not make it to the Conference. So it was time for the Chairman to address the devotees. **Dr. Karan Singh** is well known as an eminent speaker. He is at ease in dilating on any religious topic owing to his deep scholarship. Dr. Singh observed that the Ramakrishna Mission is a necessity of the age and the fulfilment too. 'It is a glorious episode in the long history of Indian renaissance and response,' he said. Looking upon the entire Indian civilization as a series of challenges, Dr. Singh added that whenever there had been a challenge, the response was creative and excellent. This is the latest creative response — the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission by Swamiji. Dr. Singh praised the efforts of the Mission; during the 100 years of its existence, it had done extraordinary work in the world, he said. Coming to Vedanta, he spoke of three ideals or insights, as he called them. The first is the unity underlying everything in the universe. Brahman is inherent in everything. The second principle is that Ishwara — the Personal God — is present in all beings. This gives a tremendous value to the principle of oneness. There will be adoration and respect mutually and this leads also to the spirit of service. The third and final insight into Vedanta is the great idea that *vasudhā eva kuṭumbakam*. The entire universe is our home. There is nobody who can be called a stranger. All belong to me. It is a human family.

Dr. Singh further said that because we did not understand or follow the above principles, there had been great damages done to our Indian ethos during its recent history of 2000 years. Desecration of temples and so on by a few invaders was

an example of this. Therefore, we should learn lessons from history and not make our household our little universe, or untruthfulness as God, or our own family members as the only gods to be served. Let us pledge to rise above such a situation and make ourselves and the nation great, Dr. Singh said.

With this the first session came to a close.

The second session of the 8th February was dedicated to the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. The subject was, 'Holy Mother: Her Message to the Modern World.'

The Keynote Address was delivered by **Swami Gokulanandaji** of Delhi. He said that the Holy Mother is the model for one and all. But for her, Sri Ramakrishna would have remained a very lofty ideal beyond our reach. The Holy Mother always lived 'in the world', so to say. Sri Ramakrishna bordered between the Infinite and the world, and so he was not graspable. Holy Mother symbolizes infinite grace and maturity, he said. Gokulanandaji next spoke about the last message of the Holy Mother and said that we can learn a lot from that.

**Dr. Bandita Bhattacharya** of Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta, spoke in Bengali. She said that superficially the Holy Mother may appear to be bound to the daily chores of the world. However, she has become the ideal of everyone during the century. She herself was unlettered but is the ideal of the highly educated. In the Mother, ideals like *tyaga, seva,* knowledge, devotion were all sweetly blended.

What can we learn from the life of the Holy Mother? We can learn the ideals of patience, devotion, love, compassion, and so on, and put them into practice in our own lives. The greatest thing that is evidently unusual in the Mother is that she looked upon even her own husband as her son. The greatest problem of today is lovelessness. The Holy Mother and her ideals will fulfil this need, Dr. Bhattacharya hoped.

**Dr. Raj Lakshmi Verma**, Reader in Sanskrit at the Allahabad University, began her talk in Sanskrit. She said that she did so, being from the Sanskrit faculty. Switching over to Hindi, Dr. Verma eloquently spoke about the various aspects of the Mother. Speaking about *dharma*, she said that it is *dharma* that creates and sustains the world. However, when there is no *dharma* in our drive for wealth and enjoyment, calamity ensues. So, once again religion had to be redefined to suit modern times. All that Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji have spoken about *dharma* are manifest in the Holy Mother's life. It is difficult to explain the Holy Mother's personality. She is simple, yet unique. Only Swamiji understood the Mother to some extent. Other direct disciples too understood her, though quite indistinctly. The Mother can be compared to the Triveni — Ganga, that is , love personified; Yamuna or service personified; and Saraswati or knowledge personified. This, far from public view.

Dr. Raj Lakshmi Verma went on to say that the Ramakrishna Sangha is the imagination and conception of the Holy Mother which has become a reality. For, it was she who prayed to Sri Ramakrishna that he should do something to bring his disciples together under a shelter. Dr. Verma concluded her excellent speech by saying that the Mother is the great ideal for the modern age.

**Swami Srikaranandaji**, an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, said that the Mother presented both the divine and human natures. If we look at the Holy Mother as the Divine Mother only, we cannot benefit much from her human personality. We can learn from her two great qualities: one is simplicity and the other, pure vision. What is so special in the Mother's simplicity? She was a villager and villagers are simple! A simple woman she was, but was worshipped first as the wife of the Master and later on as the Divine Mother. By whom? The best of the city worshipped her. Anyone can be confused about her spiritual stature as she remained hidden. Why did she choose to remain hidden? Through *viveka* or discrimination, one comes to choose what is real and important in life: God, or the world. If it is God that one wants, he will not like to show off. He will remain hidden like the Holy Mother. Similar is the second quality: she was purity itself. Her vision was pure. She could not see any blemish in others. This teaches us that we too should not look at others' faults.

The last speaker of the morning was the renowned **Dr. Lakshmi Kumari** of the Vivekananda Kendra Vedic Vision Foundation. Dr. Lakshmi Kumari is famous as a speaker. She began with these words: 'We commit a great mistake in transforming ideals into idols. We enshrine the idol, worship it and adore it. The message, however, is sadly forgotten.' With this statement as the basis of her talk, Dr. Lakshmi Kumari said that no action plan has been formulated for reformation. That must come from women. It is the woman that cleanses the home. A lot of time has already been lost. All are complaining about society. But, who is to blame? The problems in society are because the woman at home — the mother — is in grief. This has to go. Then alone there will be progress.

The Holy Mother's life is an example of the spiritualization of womanhood in all its relationship patterns. She was the finest bloom of

womanhood, whose fragrance spreads through all women now, all over the globe.

What can we learn from the Mother? In the Mother, there were no barriers. We too, the mothers especially, should give up such narrow ideas like, 'my family, my children', and so on. Let us expand. There are hundreds suffering all around. Let us help them.

Dr. Lakshmi Kumari warned devotees against the demon in the drawing room — the television — who is turning homes into hotels and relationships into formalities. How can Ramakrishna or Vivekananda, who may be waiting to be reborn, be born in such *tamasik* homes? she asked. 'Cleanse your homes and make way for *sattva*', Dr. Lakshmi Kumari called upon the womenfolk. She gave the instance of a colony in Kerala, which lighted its entire area by placing a lamp outside as soon as there was load-shedding (disruption in power supply). Using this practice as a guide, let all women enlighten their surroundings. Let old people remain at home and not have to go to old-age homes, she exhorted.

Dr. Lakshmi Kumari's excellent, practical speech appealed to one and all. With her speech, the session ended and devotees went for lunch. The post-lunch session saw a bhajan programme of **Swamis Purushottamanandaji and Sarvaganandaji**.

The final session of the Devotees' Convention was chaired by **Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj**, the senior Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order. The subject of this session was: 'Service as a Way of Life'. **Swami Bhajanananda**ji, an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, delivered the Keynote Address.

Swami Bhajananandaji began by saying that the subject should have been, 'Service as a Way of Spiritual Life'. He spoke about the requisites for making service a way of spiritual life. The first requisite is that one has to have the larger concept of service. Service does not mean only giving gifts — material gifts. It also means giving love, affection and compassion. The presentation of love in this love-starved world is a wonderful gift. Of course, the best kind of service is spiritual service, because this gift endures forever. The second requisite is understanding the sacrificial nature of life. We have all to sacrifice something for the benefit of others. This is natural because life is built upon the plan of sacrifice. The sages called it *yajna*. Therefore, if Buddha gave the message of *dharma-chakra pravartana*, Swami Vivekananda's was *yajna-chakra pravartana*. That is, Swamiji started a new cycle of service which will go on for a long, long time. The third requisite for making service a way of spiritual life was to make service a yoga. Yoga means training of the will. The controlled mind goes Godward.

Swami Bhajananandaji continued by saying that Swami Vivekananda spoke of two kinds of Karma Yoga: (1) for those who believe in a Personal God, and (2) for those who do not believe in God. The first type dedicate all their works as an offering to God. It is worship for them. The second type is the Jnana type — working with a spirit of awareness. Bhajananandaji concluded by saying that in the *Bhagavad-Gita* one finds a union of the two types of service. The term *buddhi-yoga* signifies the same.

The next speaker was **Dr. (Smt.) Shail Pandey** of the Allahabad University. Smt. Pandey said that Jnana, Bhakti and Yoga were the paths we knew which lead to God. Now, a new one, the *Seva* path has been inaugurated. *Seva* leads to purity of mind and this in turn leads to God-realization. This is what the great sages say and this is what Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have exemplified too. To see God in all beings, to be aware of Brahman in every jiva is the basis of *seva*. The Ramakrishna Mission is founded on this principle alone, Smt. Pandey said before concluding.

**Dr. Basudev Burman**, Vice-Chancellor of the Kalyani University, spoke in Bengali. Speaking along the lines of the earlier speakers, Dr. Burman said that in India today, there is a great lacking in moral and cultural values. The reason for this is not having proper education. The correct form of education needs promotion of human values like truthfulness, selflessness, purity, sincerity, and so on. The second thing that is needed is to create an atmosphere to make people love others and respect them. To be good, every student must think of the welfare of others. This has to be cultivated with the help of elders, said Dr. Burman. In the end, he quoted from a letter of Swamiji to Nivedita.

**Sri S. Ramakrishnan** of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan thanked the organizers for inviting him to speak on this occasion. Sri Ramakrishna was a unique phenomenon in the horizon of new India, he observed. He also lauded the idea of *seva*. Just as the rivers do not drink their own waters, just as the trees do not eat their own fruits but give them to others liberally, even so each human being should serve others with a spirit of sacrifice.

**Revered Ranganathanandaji Maharaj** spoke next. Quoting profusely from the scriptures, Revered Maharaj cited several instances where the worship of God in temples alone, has been decried. In spite of Vedanta teaching us for the last thousands of years, that the Lord is present in every jiva, the idea had never entered the human

heart. It was for Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji to reinstate this grand ideal of service of God in man, said Ranganathanandaji Maharaj. The uniqueness of humanity is that it can dominate the world and control it. With the little 'I', a human being can achieve wonders. Not only that. A human being also has the capacity to understand Brahman within, says the Upanishad. Biology also speaks about human uniqueness. 'Man is unique in more ways than one,' says Julian Huxley. However, we had forgotten our unique qualities. Sri Ramakrishna awakened us to this truth. Swamiji also said that for the next fifty years at least, let your God be the millions of human beings moving around. Then alone will the nation be rejuvenated.

Swami Ranganathanandaji, towards the end of his scintillating talk, hoped that the present state is only temporary. Spiritual ideas are spreading. What if only two people — Arjuna and Sanjaya — heard Sri Krishna when he narrated the truths of the *Gita*? The entire world knows it today. So is the case with Sri Ramakrishna's ideology. The world will accept it soon for its own benefit, Revered Maharaj said.

The Valedictory Benediction came from **Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj**, Most Revered President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Speaking at length about the origin and development of the ideal of service in the Ramakrishna Movement, Revered Maharaj said that Swamiji wanted to remain immersed in samadhi always. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and told that he should be like a huge banyan tree and bring solace to humanity.

Whatever we may do, we should do the same in a spirit of service and dedication to the Lord. Coming to the ideal of the highest devotee of God, Swamiji said that the highest devotee is one who serves God in all beings. To serve Him in all beings is called practical religion. The *Bhagavata* also exhorts us to do the same thing. Saying that the ideal of seeing God in others and serving them is no new ideal, Revered Maharaj said that Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji only restated the same ideal in modern language. We should all have the enlightenment in us to look upon all our fellow beings as God. This will make the world a better place to live in. The devotees, Revered Maharaj said, should go home with this ideal in mind and practise it with all earnestness.

**Swami Smarananandaji** proposed the vote of thanks and thanked all those who were responsible for the success of this Convention.

The programme was concluded with an excellent sarod recital by **Ustad Amzad Ali Khan**.

Thus came to a grand close the Devotees' Convention. The pain each devotee felt to leave the holy precincts of Belur Math was evident. Some said that they wept feeling that within a few hours they would be in faraway places. However, they took with them the noble ideals that were shared at the Convention. This seed will work through them in time for the good of the world. ❐

# Time

***RAVI VARMA***
***The author is of Haripad, Kerala.***

*Oh TIME!*
*Like your twin-brother SPACE and*
*father BRAHMAN,*
*You always existed, birthless,*
*without death.*
*You have neither shape nor colour or*
*other attributes,*
*Impossible to know, yet, real enough*
*to feel the presence.*
*We try to encage you in watches*
*and clocks,*
*Mere caricatures by us, petty humans.*
*We try markings on you,*
*What else are jubilees, centenaries*
*and the like?*
*We do need you for orderly living,*
*But your ways are odd.*
*We move forward: past, present and future,*
*You go the other way:*
*future greeting the present*
*and both merging in the past!*
*Burdened by tricks of memory and hope,*
*Our thoughts are often about a dead past*
*or an uncertain future,*
*With little benefit and often much loss.*
*What a pity, we pay scant attention*
*to the NOW.*
*The present provides a joint forum*
*for thought, feeling and action,*
*With even possibilities for growth*
*and change,*
*Glory to the living present,*
*the only effective moment,*
*Ever renewing and thus*
*fresh and eternal.* ❐

# Holy Mother: Her Message to the Modern World

SWAMI GOKULANANDA

*We give below the edited text of Revered Swami Gokulanandaji Maharaj's Keynote Address delivered at the All-India Devotees' Convention on 8 February 1998 as a part of the concluding programme of the Centenary Celebrations of the Ramakrishna Mission held at Belur Math. Revered Maharaj, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.*

Life in the present-day world is radically different from what existed even a generation earlier. In stark contrast to the undoubtedly beneficial effects of science on the life of mankind, it has brought about an insatiable measure of consumerism and a rapid pace of life towards achieving more and more. These have resulted in self-centredness, loss of character, and extreme intolerance leading to hatred and violence. The onslaught of crass materialism has submerged moral and ethical values. Man today has lost his moorings and is groping in darkness. Problems are mounting everyday and no solution seems to be in sight. Men of wisdom are few and far between and they have been eclipsed by the demagogues. Honesty and integrity are at a discount. Peace, happiness, contentment and joy have just vanished into thin air, and now connivance, chicanery and corruption rule the roost. Tragically, this is the shape of things today and this is the world in which we live!

Is there then no hope — no redemption — for us? It is precisely at such moments of crisis that the life and teachings of great personalities like the Holy Mother come to our rescue. This extraordinary individual, who appeared most ordinary to most people, is Sri Sarada Devi—the Divine Consort of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna—, the Holy Mother to her disciples and devotees. Her life and teachings form a complete course in educating the human being, both man and woman, in how to be a perfect individual. But her relevance is possibly more immediate to women because they are at present in need of an ideal which is viable in the predominantly patriarchal set-up in which they continue to live and work in spite of the constant claims to the contrary.

It is not proper to give such superlative tags to an individual's stature and leave it there. What is necessary is to trace the pragmatics of her life which make it a model worth emulating, and to analyse the possibility of its percolating to the level of the ordinary women. For such a study Sri Sarada Devi's life is most suitable. Sri Ramakrishna's life was essentially a *sadhana;* it was for the realization of the secrets of the inner dimension of human beings. Vivekananda's mission was public; it was to proclaim on the global stage, the findings of this spiritual experiment of Sri Ramakrishna. However, the role of Sri Sarada Devi was private and yet most powerful and pervasive in its influence on society; she was to put

these lofty ideals into daily practice. So, we can say that she taught us not so much by words as by deeds, which is probably the most effective method of education. Therefore, her life is a model for one and all to emulate.

In Sri Sarada Devi the perfection of Sri Ramakrishna attained an excellence of its own. Through her the remote Sri Ramakrishna came nearer, to the very centre of every home and hearth. But for her Sri Ramakrishna would have remained too conceptual an ideal, a despair of men and women of the world with all their human limitations, imperfections and smallness. To our great good fortune, the Holy Mother lived in this our very own world, as one of us.

Sri Ramakrishna always remained outside the periphery of our clumsy world and delivered his message from there. The Holy Mother showed by her own living how we are to live in this clumsy world with hundreds of exacting problems of daily life, keeping God alone as the light, solace and goal of life, thus illustrating Sri Ramakrishna's theories and principles and proving their applicability in everyday life.

Sarada Devi, born in a small obscure village of Bengal, never had an opportunity for formal education, yet lack of literacy was no impediment to her development. She had many unusual experiences even as a child which speak volumes about the purity and height of her inner being. She was married to Sri Ramakrishna at the age of six and lived all her life as his disciple, willingly serving him in every way without claiming any special privilege for being his wife. When she was away from him, people often tortured her with cruel words: that she was married to a madman. But she had the inner strength to withstand all such attacks. When Sri Ramakrishna left his mortal frame, she did not take on the insignia of a widow because she was convinced that the spirit is immortal though the body is impermanent. Her shy and self-effacing nature notwithstanding, she had to assume the role of the 'Sangha-Janani' (Mother of the Order) after Sri Ramakrishna's departure, and this role she played with the same efficiency with which she had done all her household chores that had formed a part of her training since childhood. She had immense potential which did not consider any challenge unsurmountable. Her life was made thorny by constant demands from her brothers, nieces and nephews, and innumberable devotees from all parts of the land. But in adversity she was rock-like in her demeanour, an attitude which in itself is the first step to solving even the most difficult of problems. In all that she did, infinite grace and maturity characterized Sarada Devi. People thought she was entangled in *maya* due to her apparent attachment to all those who formed her extended family. But in a moment she could, and actually did, let go all those bonds when it was time. In her silent and non-aggressive manner, she achieved sterling victories in every task she undertook. Her gentle nature was not a cover for cowardice because when the occasion so demanded, she could be equally firm and unflinching. She had flexibility without being wavering or indecisive. For her, the trimming of the wick of a lamp was as important a job as doing the daily worship or observing spiritual discipline, because each demanded perfection, and for that perfection everything had to be done with complete concentration.

In the course of her conversations with the people around her, the Holy Mother, in her usual modest and humble manner, gave innumerable gems of instructions on how to live a worthy life. They were spoken with such total ease that none of the instructions carried an oppressive canonical burden. Reading these is like conversing with a friend who tells us with affectionate concern how to make our lives better. She never sits in judgement or says that what we are doing at present is wrong. To her, every action

appeared in some sense or the other beneficial and positive. Only she sometimes felt that it could have been done better: improved upon but not abandoned totally. Since each individual has a different temperament, we have to proceed accordingly and assimilate what we believe is suitable for us. Blanket rules may not suit all people, and trying to follow such rules only results in dryness and depression.

The sensate culture of today's world, steeped as it is in materialism and consumerism, kindles endless demands by the body which we rush to fulfil. An entire life is spent in caring for the needs of the body. Not many of us have even a little time to devote to meeting the needs of the mind, or to even finding out if the mind is also clamouring for certain things. In this frenzied state what we need is solitude and introspection. Once we have these we may learn to read the status of our minds and then the faults of others will appear minimal compared to those we find in our own selves. Self-assessment is certainly the first step to inner growth and we would do well to draw this lesson from the teachings of the Holy Mother.

At present frivolity seems to be the order of the day, especially after the invasion by media which have proliferated hugely and managed to hypnotize the young and the old alike. In such a situation, the Mother's extreme reserve is a refreshing change. To cultivate it, women will require great courage because being an unusual behaviour it invites cutting criticism from even the near and dear ones. It is surprising that in the world of today indecorous behaviour goes uncommented upon while self-control and quietude are adversely remarked about.

Some of the other characteristics found in Sarada Devi which are worth striving for are her calm, gentle and modest nature, her soft-spokenness, patience, perseverance and endurance.

The Holy Mother is an example of service with a smile. She did the meanest of her tasks — to her no task was mean — with a complete sense of satisfaction. Dogged as we are by selfishness and possessiveness, we are here in the presence of a lady who lived within a few metres of her beloved husband and yet had to strain her every nerve to catch a glimpse of him or to spend a few minutes with him. When she was told that she might, if she so wished, accompany him on a trip to a temple celebration, just the manner of speech made her wisely intuit that he was not very eager — sensing it would draw unpleasant remarks from others — to take her along. Without a moment's hesitation, she adapted herself to this decision. She was ready to do whatever others expected of her as long as she was convinced it was just and proper, though she was by no stretch of imagination weak-minded.

An advice to remember is Mother's words about having in life a clear sense of purpose. 'Always be engaged in some work or other. It is conducive to the health of both the body and the mind.' When we see women whiling away precious moments of their life in gossip and socializing, we wonder where all this will lead human civilization to. As respositories of culture, women have a crucial role to play which they seem to be neglecting by pursuing fruitless goals.

Let me conclude this speech with the last message of the Holy Mother. Her biographer writes: 'Five days before her passing away, a lady devotee known as "mother of Annapurna" came to see her. As no one was then allowed to enter the Holy Mother's room, she sat at the doorway. The Mother caught sight of her and beckoned to her to come near. She bowed down and sobbed out, "Mother, what will happen to us hereafter?" The Mother consoled her in a low, almost inaudible voice, "Why do you fear? You have seen the Master." After a pause she added, "But I tell you one thing — if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is

a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own!"'

If we ponder over and meditate upon this simple message of the Holy Mother, we find that it contains two very important truths which are of supreme importance to humanity today. The Mother said, 'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults.' Here 'if' is the operative word. Those who make a choice and earnestly want peace of mind, need to curb the fault-finding tendency in them. Others need not heed her words till they come to that state of mind where peace appears as a quality to be desired. How much freedom there is in these simple words which have such a profound and transformative import!

The second part of the message which follows as a natural sequence of the first is: 'Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own.' Here is a definite imperative for world conquest — a conquest which is to be made only through self-mastery.

On proper analysis, these words used by the Holy Mother convey a dual message — one is outward, the other is inward. The central theme of this message is to shift the focus from outward to inward. If people see their own faults, will there be any fault left to be seen? We acquire faults by seeing faults. When we sincerely see our own faults, we will have very little time to see others' faults. As one advances in this practice, the apparent distinction between the self and others disappears. Such a person can never be a cause of any suffering for anybody in the world. When a man has thoroughly imbibed the virtue of not seeing faults in others, he has already unconsciously learned to make the whole world his own, for he has discovered his identity with all. This principle can be easily extended to national and international levels whereby faults of other nations are ignored, and world conquest through lasting peace can be achieved.

The Holy Mother clearly demonstrated that in spite of all the outward differences and variations that exist among the peoples of the world, there can be a union of souls threaded together by unbounded love for one another. From the beginning of her life, the Holy Mother laid emphasis on the necessity of making people one's own. This 'own-making' was the special mission of her life, as we see it in a continuous, uninterrupted flow from the beginning till the end. Thus, she does not differentiate between Amzad, the Muslim robber and her intimate associate, Sarat, alias Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna; she looks upon the Englishman, who was at that time considered to be the enemy of the country, as her own child. Thus, poised in the sense of motherhood, she could break all barriers between man and man and stand above all humanity, whether of the East or of the West, Indian or foreign, righteous or erring.

If the world has to be pulled out from the abyss into which it has fallen, the only way is to mould our lives in the light of the Holy Mother's teachings and then to carry the message far and wide to create the necessary impact and give a new orientation to the lives of people. This is not an ordinary task and yet we can do it, provided we have the requisite will fortified with the grace of the Holy Mother. The ideal should not remain an ideal only, but should be put into practice. The world today needs the message desparately, and it is we who shall have to convey it. ❐

The battle with others may become physically tiresome but the battle with your own self will strengthen you.

—Dr. P. Dhanavel, Agartala

# What Some Feel...

*Just before the All-India Devotees' Convention began on 7 February 1998, ten envelopes, each containing a paper with three questions on it, were distributed by Swami Sunirmalananda to ten delegates chosen at random, except in the case of one or two, from the 10,000 who participated. The major thought behind selecting a sample of ten out of 10,000 was to cover, as far as possible, delegates coming from different parts of India, and obtain a representative view, so to say. Unfortunately, those coming from abroad could not be contacted. The views in writing were handed over by these chosen delegates to the Swami before their departure. What is given below are their views, suitably arranged and edited by the Swami. We are aware that the sample is too small to draw conclusions.*

Even as the microphone played the *shehnai,* even as thousands of eager delegates were pouring into the Belur Math that cold wintry morning, I tensely waited to select some ten delegates who were to answer just three questions in writing. I had earlier prepared in writing a request to the concerned delegate for answers to the three questions and got together sufficient paper with self-addressed envelopes. Except one or two whom I had in mind, the rest were chosen at chance meetings and they eagerly agreed to answer the questions. In spite of their busy schedule on the two days of the Convention, they did give us the feedback.

The three questions were: (i) What are your impressions about the Ramakrishna Mission?, (ii) In what ways can the Mission help people in modern times?, and (iii) What are your ideas about the Devotees' Convention?

### *Impressions About the Ramakrishna Mission*

Since it was the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission, I thought it pertinent to gather a sample view about the Mission.

**Dr. H.K. Prakash** of Bangalore, who is the Director of Karnataka Milk Federation, writes: 'My contact with the Mission is only since nine years. I have been attracted and impressed by the simplicity of the swamis of the Mission.' He said that the way the monks mix with common people is so simple and genuine, unlike what one finds in other similar places. Dr. Prakash was also impressed, he said, about the way monks solved the doubts of the common masses.

**Miss T. Manju** from Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, said that she felt that the Ramakrishna Mission was her own home.

A hotel consultant and a faculty in a management institute in New Delhi, **Mr. Gauri Bhusan** writes that personally 'I like the Mission because there is no communication gap between me or my family members and the Mission. We are free to talk and clear our doubts.' Mr. Bhusan also had a few kind words about the various welfare activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

**Mr. Ranjan Nandi Mazumdar,** a businessman of Calcutta, felt incompetent to write about the Mission because his contacts were limited to meeting Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj occasionally. He however added, '...I am aware of the very good work being done by the Ramakrishna Mission.' He also writes that he has visited some of the Mission's centres in India, and 'all my worldly worries simply seem to evaporate' when he visits the Math.

**Mr. B.G. Prasad,** a bank employee of Chennai, said he has consulted three more friends before answering the questions. He feels: 'The Mission with its modern outlook and approach, setting aside ritualistic methods, could easily appeal to the youth.' He also feels that a sound moral base can be given to the youth for a bright future.

**Mrs. Swapna Chattopadhyaya** had come from New Delhi. She said she is a vocal musician and a housewife. Her views about the Ramakrishna Mission were as follows: 'The religious and educational activities are praiseworthy. Thousands of devotees are benefited not only mentally but also spiritually. Constantly guided by monks, people get lot of mental peace by reading religious books....' Mrs. Chatterjee, however, adds: 'I am afraid the social welfare activities are taking a back seat.' She also feels that somehow people should be motivated towards a noble cause. She also adds that the Mission activities, 'should be controlled in such a way that there is a balance between spiritual and social activities in India and abroad.' Mrs. Chatterjee recently returned from the USA.

**Mrs. Suchita Sawant** is a housewife from Kolhapur, Maharashtra. 'Really, I do not find any words. I am very happy to be associated with the Ramakrishna Mission. I am still searching for

expressions. In fact, when I entered Belur Math, I forgot everything.

The Indian Institute of Technology, popularly known by the acronym I.I.T. is famous throughout India. One of the five I.I.T.s is at Kharagpur. A respected professor of this Institute, **Dr. Devaprasad Bhattacharya**, kindly consented to answer my question. He said that the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission are all laudable. The Mission's uniqueness as he saw it, was that it 'not only serves people irrespective of their religious affiliation but it also holds the recipient's religion in respect.'

The Mumbai delegate **Mr. Rakesh Puri** is a Finance Manager and Company Secretary. What does he think about the Ramakrishna Mission? 'It is a unique organization. The greatest strength of the Mission is its respect for all. I really admire the love and respect monks have for each other and for the devotees.' Even though its resources are limited, the Mission's earnestness is praiseworthy. Mr. Puri further feels that it is owing to its strict adherence to Swamiji's ideals and guidelines that the Mission crossed the 100th milestone. He, however, wonders why people of other religions do not actively participate in the Mission's activities, even though the Mission is transparently liberal.

**Miss Purba Sengupta** is a name to reckon with in Bengal's religious literature today. At quite a young age, she has established herself as an excellent writer. 'The ideal of service in Buddhist Sangha has been deified into worship in the Ramakrishna Sangha. Even as its founder was original, the organization too is original, as Christopher Isherwood said,' comments Miss Sengupta.

### *The Way Mission Can Serve in Modern Times*

In a modern world, where values are fast disappearing, in what ways can the Ramakrishna Mission serve people? The response to this question in general was that each was satisfied with the Mission's approach to life and its problems.

**Mrs. Swapna Chattopadhyaya** feels that in a world of stress and strain, for leading a fruitful value-based life, we need ideals or role models. She also feels that monks can be role models to the modern generation. With their learning and way of life, monks can impress modern people and thereby influence them.

Chennai's **Mr. B.G. Prasad** feels that the Mission can certainly help the youth since it has a modern outlook. **Mr. Ranjan Mazumdar** quoting Swamiji says that if the goal is to make a Hindu a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, and a Christian a better Christian, then the way is to spread such ideas among the masses. This will 'make us come out of the grave we are [otherwise] digging for ourselves,' he said.

New Delhi's **Mr. Gauri Bhusan** is for many more such conventions. For him this would help let out the steam called stress and also promote interaction with other devotees and admirers. He suggests the opening of a page on the Internet Web. This has been done a year or so ago. From Rajahmundry, **Miss Manju** says that the Mission follows Swamiji's ideals; and that is enough to be on the right track. **Dr. Devaprasad Bhattacharya** of I.I.T. says: 'In the educational centres run by it, the Ramakrishna Mission should put more emphasis on Swamiji's ideals of man-making, character-building assimilation of ideas, than on career-building.' He feels that the need for spiritual education is never more relevant than it is now.

The writer **Miss Purba Sengupta** feels that the Ramakrishna Mission is to follow three paths of service: giving knowledge of spirituality, giving secular education, and providing material relief. The Mission can help modern society through all these three channels. In this, its methodology will be steady but firm.

The Manager **Mr. Rakesh Puri** of Mumbai wants ideas of the Holy Trio made more easily available. 'Print and visual media must effectively be used, even from school level, to spread ideas,' he says. He wants also an aggressive approach now, after a hundred years of the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission. **Mrs. Suchita Sawant** of Kolhapur was of the opinion that the Mission's discipline will be a great lesson to the youth. When no one knows what Hinduism exactly is, the Mission can help in this, she felt.

**Dr. H.K. Prakash** of Bangalore feels, like Mr. Puri, that the approach of the Mission in spreading ideas should be a little more aggressive. Of course, he knows that the Mission is short of hands.

One important thing this Director of Karnataka Milk Federation draws our attention to is that the common person feels that the Mission expects a very high standard and so, he or she may not be able to enter its precincts freely. This feeling will go the moment such people come in contact with the monks. Mr. Prakash further feels that devotees of the Mission also must help spread the message at least among relatives and friends.

### *About the Devotees' Convention*

One likes to know what benefit has been derived by attending a two days' devotees' convention like the present one.

The answers of the delegates were as follows. While each one of them were certainly benefited by the Convention, individual experiences var-

ied. For Mumbai's **Mr. Rakesh Puri** it should be conducted once in every three years. 'It presents a great atmosphere,' he feels with tens of thousands of delegates at Belur Math. He benefited, among others, in two ways: (i) He got the hope that India has a future — a bright future, and (ii) He learnt that organizational skills can work wonders.

**Miss Purba Sengupta** feels that in this Convention people with the same ideal of God-realization came together. 'Sri Ramakrishna is our Chosen Ideal. Keeping Him before us and attending such a great congregation will no doubt increase the spiritual aspiration of everyone,' she feels.

Calling it a fruitful event, **Dr. Devaprasad Bhattacharya** says that he is particularly impressed to know that lay devotees also have an important role to play in the Mission's activities. **Mrs. Suchita Sawant** of Kolhapur says she is particularly benefited by the speeches she had heard. She says that within two days she learnt a lot that she had not known earlier.

An exactly opposite opinion is given by **Mr. Ranjan Mazumdar.** Speech after speech will make such events boring, he feels. It would be better, he feels, if in the future there are some sessions in which the devotees too can participate. Mr. Mazumdar feels deeply indebted to the organizers because he could hear, among others, Srimat Swami Bhtueshanandaji Maharaj speak.

**Miss T. Manju** of Rajahmundry feels that such conventions should be compulsory for devotees in modern times. It is the bombs (the flower bombs of ideas) that were hurled, which she feels will work in all minds and destroy ignorance.

**Mr. Gauri Bhusan** feels that the gap between the earlier and this Convention is long. He adds that with this Convention as the inspiration, a lot could be achieved because, be it the Salt Lake Stadium or elsewhere, the devotees mixed with each other forgetting all differences.

**Mrs. Swapna Chattopadhyaya** feels that instead of continuous lecturing, one may think of audio-visual methods. Question-Answer sessions could be useful. These apart, the Convention was highly beneficial, she says. The special positive point is that one can interact with devotees from different parts of the globe.

**Sri B.G. Prasad** and others of Chennai say that it was 'well managed and mammoth'. The time duration, he and his friends feel, was short.

**Dr. H.K. Prakash** of Bangalore feels that 'two days are very very insufficient. It should have been at least four days. I have been impressed,' he says, 'very much by the greatness of the Mission.' Mr. Prakash further says that he was of the idea that in the Convention a few swamis may give lectures along with the rituals of inauguration and valedictory ceremony. He was surprised to see the variety.

All the delegates whom we contacted feel that there should be a repetition of such conventions, and that often. We earnestly hope that their desire will be fulfilled. ❐

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# Fixing the Mind on God-V

*(Continued from page 375)*

peg and leaves her to graze. Only if she grazes and has eaten the grass within her reach does the Master come and loosen the rope making more area of the ground available to her. What we must therefore do is to find even in the most difficult circumstances streaks of opportunities and strive hard; and when the situation is more favourable, feel grateful to God and plunge with greater effort. One need not regret for an opportunity unutilized through one's own fault! Rather, understanding that, 'There is a place even in this body, where the mind being pitched, one can be perfectly at ease. What is required is a change of the angle of vision,'[27] let us strive to locate that 'place' in us even before death catches up with us.

*(to be continued)*

27. Swami Turiyananda in *Talks*, p. 251.

If you keep tilling your mind, you can reap your harvest every day and every minute.

—Dr. P. Dhanavel, Agartala

# साधनगीता
# Gita for Spiritual Practice

## साधनप्रकाशिकासहिता
## With an Exegesis on Spiritual Practice

DR. B.R. PHANI KUMAR

श्रीरामकृष्णपादाब्जं नत्वा विज्ञानसाधनम्।
गीतासाधनव्याख्यानं यथामति विरच्यते॥

Bowing down at Sri Ramakrishna's Lotus Feet, a means to Knowledge, I write a gloss on the spiritual practice in Gita, according to my understanding.

वीरेश्वरानन्दगुरुं भजेयं श्रीमन्त्रबोधामृतवर्षकं मे।
वन्दे तथाऽद्वैतविबोधकं तं प्राज्ञं नृसिंहाभिधशास्त्रिणं वै॥

I worship my guru, Swami Vireswarananda, who showered on me the nectar-like consciousness of the sacred mantra. Similarly, I bow down to the scholarly Narasimha Sastry, who taught me the Advaita Vedanta.

### प्रास्ताविकम्।

अथ खलु परमकारुणिको भगवान् वासुदेवः शोकमोहाद्यज्ञाननिमग्नं लोकं उद्दिधीर्षुः श्रीमद् गीताशास्त्रं समस्तशास्त्रसारं ज्ञानवहमुपदिदेश स्वशिष्याय अर्जुनाय तद्द्वारा लोकः श्रेयोऽवाप्नुयादिति। परमनिःश्रेयससाधनस्यास्य शास्त्रस्य प्रयोजनं स्वात्मतत्त्वावगतिनिष्ठारूपो मोक्षः।

### Preamble

Now, Lord Vasudeva of supreme compassion, with a view to lifting up the world engrossed in ignorance due to sorrow, delusion, etc. taught his disciple, Arjuna, the scripture called Gita, which is the essence of all the scriptures and which bestows Knowledge, so that the world may benefit through it. The purpose of this scripture, a means to the 'summum bonum' of life, is Liberation, which means, to be established in the Knowledge of one's Self.

विवेकिनां सुलभबोधमपीदं शास्त्रं मन्दबुद्धीनां दुरवगाहमिति बहुभिर्महद्भिर्बहुधा व्याख्यातम्। तथाऽपि कृत्स्नशास्त्रपरिशीलने अशक्तानां मुमुक्षूणां कृते अध्यात्मसाधनैकपराः मोक्षस्वरूपाभिव्यञ्जकाः सकृत्स्मरणेनैव दुर्ग्राह्यपरमार्थतत्त्वदर्शकाः दुर्गमापवर्गमार्गदर्शकाः हस्तन्यस्तामलकवदात्मज्ञानप्रदर्शकाः निरन्तरस्मृतिरूपसाधनाः केचनैव श्लोकाः ततः संगृह्यात्र व्याख्यायन्ते।

Though this scripture is easily understood by the wise, it is incomprehensible to the imprudent. Hence, it was commented upon by many great ones in many ways. Even then, for the sake of those seekers after Liberation who cannot ponder over the entire scripture, only some verses, which are meant exclusively for spiritual practice, which reflect the nature of Liberation, which by their mere remembrance reveal the difficult-to-comprehend Nature of the Supreme Goal, which indicate the path to Emancipation so difficult to attain, which unfold the Knowledge of the Self even as a gooseberry placed in the palm of one's hand, and whose constant remembrance is a spiritual practice, are selected therefrom and explained here.

एषां श्लोकानामेकोऽपि श्लोकः सम्यगनुध्यातश्चेत् अनुध्यायिनं मोक्षभाजं करोति, तथाऽपि साधनेषु मुमुक्षूणां भिन्नरुचिं शक्तिभेदमधिकारभेदं च विचार्य कियन्तः श्लोकाः कर्मयोगज्ञानयोगध्यानयोगभक्तियोगपरतया

भिन्नप्रस्थानाः व्याख्यानाय संगृहीताः।

Though even one of these verses confers Liberation on one who deeply meditates upon it, considering the differences in interest, capacity and qualification of aspirants for spiritual practices, a few verses are selected for explanation. These verses deal with different paths (to Liberation), having for their principal theme the union (of individual soul with God) through work, knowledge, meditation and devotion.

तत्राध्यात्मसाधनं नाम सर्वासां चित्तवृत्तीनां निरोधे प्रयत्नः। ता एव हि मनोवृत्तयः संकल्पविकल्पाभिनिवेशसुखदुःखाद्यनेकप्रत्ययभेदभिन्नाः विक्षेपकारिण्यः पुरुषं व्याकुलीकृत्य इतस्ततः भ्रामयन्ति स्वरूपात् च्यावयन्ति च। अतः ता निरुध्य निरन्तरं इव ताभिरभिभूयमानां नित्यसत्यां अखण्डाद्वयाकारां सदैकरूपां क्रियाकारकफलादिसर्वभेदरहितां मोक्षकरीं निरतिशयानन्ददायिनीं स्वस्वरूपाभिव्यञ्जकब्रह्माकारवृत्तिं प्राप्तुं अवश्यं प्रयत्नः कर्तव्यः। यतः स्वस्वरूपावस्थानमेव परमं प्रयोजनं फलं च जन्मनः।

Be that as it may, spiritual practice means an attempt to control all the mental modifications. Verily, these mental modifications which create turbulence and which are variously characterized by many different experiences such as volition, doubt, determination, joy, sorrow, etc. agitate man, make him run hither and thither, and make him slip from (the remembrance of) his real nature. Therefore, an attempt should necessarily be made to obtain, by control of these modifications, the state of the nature of Brahman which reveals one's own nature, which though seems to be perpetually overpowered by these modifications, is eternally true, infinite, non-dual, ever of oneness, devoid of all differences as to action, agent, fruit, etc., confers Liberation, and grants unsurpassed Bliss. As the supreme purpose and fruition of life is only to abide in one's own nature, this attempt should be made.

एतन्मोक्षप्राप्त्युपकारका गीतायां भगवतोपदिष्टाः कर्मभक्तिध्यानज्ञानयोगाः संक्षेपतो निरुच्यन्ते।

The Yogas or ways of (union through) work, devotion, meditation and knowledge taught by the Lord (Sri Krishna) in the Gita as the means to the attainment of this Liberation are briefly explained.

तत्र तावत् कर्मयोगो नाम शास्त्रोपदिष्टानां स्वभावनियतानां कर्मणां फलासङ्गं त्यक्त्वा परमेश्वरार्पणबुद्ध्यानुष्ठानम्। परमेश्वरेण प्रेरितोऽहं तदर्थं तद्भृत्यः तत्कर्मैतत्करोमि न मम प्रयोजनाय इत्येतद्बुद्ध्या क्रियमाणं कर्म अकर्मैव प्राप्नोति। फलस्य परमात्मन्यर्पितत्वात्। एवं सततं कर्म कुर्वाणोऽपि साधकः फलाभिसंधिवर्जितश्चेत् चित्तशुद्धिद्वारेण ज्ञाननिष्ठारूपां सिद्धिं प्राप्स्यति।

Firstly, Karma Yoga or the way of work means performance of duties corresponding to one's propensity and as enjoined by scriptures, renouncing the attachment to their fruits by offering them (the fruits) to the Lord. The work done with the thought, 'Being prompted by the Lord, I do His work for His sake, as His servant, but not for my gain', turns out to be non-action, because the fruit (of the work) is offered to the Lord. Thus, though the aspirant is always engaged in action, he attains to perfection in the form of establishment in Knowledge through purification of mind, if he is free from the desire for the fruit (of action).

'असक्तो ह्याचरन् कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः' (३.१९), 'कर्मण्यभिप्रवृत्तोपि नैव किञ्चित् करोति सः' (४.२०), 'यज्ञायाचरतः कर्म समग्रं प्रविलीयते॥' (४.२३), 'ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः। लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा॥' (५.१०) इत्यादीनि भगवद्वचनान्येवात्र प्रमाणम्। यदि सिद्धेः पूर्वं साधनावस्थायां असक्तबुद्ध्या कर्म करोति तदन्तःकरणशुद्धये भवति। सिद्धेरनन्तरं कृतकृत्यत्वात् करणीयमेव नास्ति। तथापि यदि तदा चेत् कर्म करोति तल्लोकसंग्रहार्थं भवति।

The Lord's utterances such as, 'By performing action in a detached manner, man attains to the Highest' (3.19), 'Though engaged in action, verily, he does not do anything' (4.20), 'The entire work of one, who performs for the sake of sacrifice, melts' (4.23), 'He who works renouncing attachment and dedicating the actions in Brahman, is not touched by sin, as a lotus petal by water' (5.10) are verily an authority regarding this (Karma Yoga). Before attaining Perfection, during the period of spiritual practice, if the aspirant performs work with detachment, it will be conducive to the purification of the mind. After attaining Perfection, verily, there is (left undone) no duty for him to do, because of his being established in the state of having done all the duties. Even then, if he performs action, it is conducive to the welfare of the world.

भक्तियोगे साधकः जगतः उत्पत्तिस्थितिलयहेतोः सकलजीवाधारात् भगवतोऽन्यत्र शरणमपश्यन् तमेव सर्वभावेन शरणं गत्वा तदारूढचेतास्सन् स्मरणध्यानभजनपूजादिभिरीश्वरं सततमर्चयति। सर्वकर्मफलं च परमात्मनि संन्यस्यति। एवमनन्यचेतस्तया भगवद्ध्यानतत्परो नित्ययुक्तो भूत्वा हर्षशोकरागद्वेषादिद्वन्द्वातीतो भगवद्भावापन्नः प्रमुच्यते। 'तमेव शरणं गच्छ सर्वभावेन भारत। तत्प्रसादात् परां शान्तिं स्थानं प्राप्स्यसि शाश्वतम्॥' (१८.६२), 'सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज। अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः॥' (१८.६६) इत्यादिभिः भक्तियोगस्य प्राधान्यमवगम्यते।

In Bhakti Yoga or the way of devotion, the aspirant, finding protection nowhere else than in the Lord, Who is the cause of origination, preservation and dissolution of the world and the Substratum of all beings, takes refuge in Him alone in every way, and, with his mind fixed on Him, always worships the Lord with remembrance, meditation, devotion, adoration, etc. He also offers the fruit of all actions to the Supreme Self. Thus, being intent on meditation on the Lord with an undivided mind and being ever concentrated, he transcends the dualities like pleasure and grief, love and hatred, etc., attains the Nature of the Lord, and is emancipated. From the verses like, 'O, Descendant of Bharata! Take refuge in Him alone by all means. By His grace, you will attain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode' (18.62), 'Renouncing all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I will release you from all sins; do not grieve' (18.66), etc., the supremacy of Bhakti Yoga is understood.

ध्यानयोगे तावत् साधकः कस्मिंश्चिद् ध्येये मनः समाधातुं प्रयतते। ध्यानं नाम मनस एकत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता। लोके सर्वे यत्किञ्चिद् ध्यायन्त एव दृश्यते। प्रायशो ध्यानमेतल्लोके बाह्यविषयानुद्दिश्य प्रवर्तते। मनसः बहिर्मुखत्वात्। तदेव मनो यदि विषयेभ्य आहृत्य वृत्तिभ्यः सन्निरुध्य हृदयान्तःस्थे परमात्मनि वशं नीयते, तद् ध्यानमुच्यते। यद्यपि बहुजन्मसंप्राप्तवासनाभिर्निरन्तरं विषयाभिमुखीभिः बहिराकृष्यमाणस्य मनसो निरोधः सुदुष्करः, तथाऽपि बाह्यविषयेषु दोषदर्शनाभ्याससंजातवैराग्येण चित्तस्य पुनः पुनः परमात्मनि स्थापनप्रयत्नाभ्यासेन च मनो निग्रहीतुं शक्यते। एवं दृढनिश्चयेन योगाय प्रयतमानस्य साधकस्य निरन्तरं दीर्घकालं च ध्यायतः सर्वाः मनोवासना दुरुच्छेद्या अपि समूलघातं विनश्यन्ति। तन्नाशे विध्वस्तान्तर्मलस्य योगिनः स्वरूपावस्थानरूपा अखण्डसच्चिदानन्दब्रह्माकारवृत्तिः भवन्त्येव सार्वदिकासदृशानन्ददायिनी भवति। 'युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी विगतकल्मषः। सुखेन ब्रह्मसंस्पर्शमत्यन्तं सुखमश्नुते॥' (६.२८), तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोऽधिकः। कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन॥ (६.४६) इति भगवता योगस्य स्तुतत्वात् तस्य प्रामाण्यम्।

In Dhyana Yoga or the way of meditation, the aspirant tries to concentrate his mind on any object of meditation. Meditation means concentrating mental ideation at one point. All the people in the world seem to be meditating on something or other. Mostly, this thoughtfulness seen in the world is directed to external objects, because the mind is out-going (by nature). If that very mind is gathered from the objects, restrained from modifications and brought under the subjugation of the Supreme Self abiding in the (cave

of the) heart, it is called meditation. Though it is extremely difficult to control the mind which is being drawn out perpetually by inherent tendencies gained in many previous births and inclined towards objects, it is possible to control it by dispassion born of the practice of seeing defects in the external objects and by the practice of repeated efforts to establish the mind in the Lord. Though difficult to eradicate, all the mental tendencies of the aspirant, thus attempting at Yoga with firm resolve and meditating constantly for a long time, will be destroyed together with their roots. On their destruction, the inner impurity in the yogi will be removed, and for such a one the ever-present mental state manifesting Brahman of infinite Existence, Knowledge and Bliss reveals itself bestowing eternal and incomparable happiness. The Yoga of meditation has authenticity because it is praised by the Lord thus: 'Concentrating his mind always thus, the yogi, whose impurity is removed, easily attains to Supreme Bliss which is the union with Brahman' (6.28), and 'A yogi excels men of penance. He is known to be even greater than men of Knowledge. He is also superior to men of action. Hence, O Arjuna! become a yogi' (6.46).

ज्ञानयोगे साधकः अज्ञानभञ्जनेन स्वात्मज्ञानं प्रेप्सति। अज्ञानं नाम अनात्मसु देहेन्द्रियमनोबुद्ध्यहंकारादिषु उपाधिषु आत्मबुद्धिः प्रत्यगात्मनि चानात्मबुद्धिः। एतेनैवाज्ञानेन सर्वानर्थहेतुभूतेन विमोहितः सन् जीवः स्वयं निराकारनिर्गुणनिरञ्जनस्वरूपोऽपि स्वस्मिन् कल्पितेषु अनित्येषु देहादिषु सत्त्वादिगुणेषु च स्वात्मानमध्यस्य अहं कर्ता भोक्ता सुखी दुःखीत्यभिमन्यते। जननमरणाद्यनाद्यनन्तयन्त्रे परिभ्राम्यति च। एतस्याज्ञानमृत्युवशंगतस्य जीवस्य केनचित् महाकारुणिकेन गुरुणा तत्त्वमसीत्यादिमहावाक्ययुक्तैः स्वात्मानन्दसुधासंयुतैः सुधांशुनीहारसदृशशीतलैः वज्रसितैः अज्ञानभञ्जकैः मृदुमधुरगम्भीरवचोभिः त्वं ब्रह्मैव केवलं नित्यमुक्तं साक्षिरूपं असङ्गमेतेभ्यः सर्वेभ्य उपाधिभ्यो भिन्नमखण्डसच्चिदानन्दमिति आत्मतत्वमुपदिष्टस्य परमात्माजिज्ञासा जायते। ततः स निरन्तरं स्वात्मानमन्नमयादिकोशेभ्यो जाग्रदाद्यवस्थाभ्यः सत्त्वादिगुणेभ्यश्च विविच्य दृश्यप्रपञ्चं सर्वं प्रविलाप्य केवलदृग्रूपेण स्थातुं प्रयतते। एवं सततात्यन्तविवेकवैराग्यवतः स्वात्मविचारमभ्यस्यतश्च ब्रह्मैव केवलमहमिति सम्यग्ज्ञानेन सर्वप्रत्ययानन्तरितस्फुटबोधरूपात्मसाक्षात्कारो भवति। 'न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते' (४.३८), 'ज्ञानी त्वात्मैव मे मतम्' (७.१८) इत्यादिभिः भगवद्वचोभिः ज्ञानस्य प्रामाण्यमवगम्यते।

In Jnana Yoga or the way of Knowledge, the aspirant wishes to attain to the Knowledge of the Self by destroying ignorance. Ignorance means mistaking the Self for the non-Self which is the limiting adjuncts like the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego, etc., and mistaking the non-Self for the Inner Self. Though the embodied being is, by himself, the formless, attributeless and stainless Self, he, being deluded by this very ignorance which is the cause of all misery, identifies his Self with the impermanent adjuncts like the body, etc. and attributes like sattva, etc. which are projected on his own Self, and thinks: 'I am the doer, the enjoyer, happy and sorrowful', and revolves round and round through the beginningless and endless cycle of birth, death, etc. For such a Jiva overcome by death (transmigration) called ignorance, the desire to know the Supreme Self arises when he is taught the Nature of the Self by a teacher endowed with great compassion, through gentle, sweet and profound words which contain great utterances such as 'Thou art That', etc., destroy ignorance, are endowed with the nectar of the Bliss of Self, which are cool as the moon and dew, yet sharp as diamond, thus: 'You are verily none other than Brahman alone, eternally free, of the nature of Witness, detached, different from all these limiting adjuncts, and are infinite Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.' Thenceforth, he always tries to remain in the state of mere Witness by discriminating his Self from sheaths like the gross

*(Continued on page 418)*

# Clarifications/Corrections

### 'Swami Brahmananda'

Two questions (which will be obvious from the reply) were raised by Swami Adrijananda (Suryakanta), Viraja Kutir, Ujeli, Uttarakashi, U.P., PIN 249 193, in connection with the instalment of 'Swami Brahmananda' which appeared in the November 1997 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*. The learned author, Revered Swami Chetanananda ji Maharaj, Head of Vedanta Society of St. Louis, replies as follows:

I. *Prabuddha Bharata* 1997, p. 740: 'Then, on Swamiji's birthday he [Swami Brahmananda] initiated forty members of the ashrama into sannyasa and brahmacharya.'

There are four references with three versions:

1. *Swami Brahmananda* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, Bengali Saka 1348), p. 271: The number is **40**.

2. Swami Gambhirananda, *Bhakta Malika-I* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, Bengali Saka 1370), p. 134: The number is **40**.

3. Brahmachari Akshay Chaitanya, *Brahmananda Lilakatha* (Calcutta: Nava Bharat Publishers, Bengali Saka 1369), p. 74: The number is **37** (22 sannyasa and 15 brahmacharya).

4. Swami Prabhananda, *Brahmananda Charit* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1982), p. 255: The number is **35** (20 sannyasa and 15 brahmacharya).

I took the first version because that was the first official biography of Swami Brahmananda, and I heard that Swamis Sankarananda and Nirvananda supplied materials for that book.

II. *Prabuddha Bharata* 1997, p. 744: 'Considering Maharaj to be the living Gopala, the nuns poured milk into his mouth, but it ran down his chin because he was in samadhi, and they wiped his chin with a handkerchief.' (The questioner states that this is in disagreement with that in *Brahmananda Charit* (p. 418) by Swami Prabhananda where it is maintained that Maharaj 'drank glass after glass of milk'.)

There are two eyewitness accounts of this incident:

1. Swami Prabhavananda's reminiscences in *Vedanta Kesari*, February 1975, p. 360.

2. Swami Mukteswarananda, *Smritikatha* (Calcutta, Bengali Saka 1377), pp. 163–6. (Brahmachari Akshay Chaitanya used Swami Mukteswarananda's report in his *Brahmananda Lilakatha*, pp. 224–7.)

I combined both of these reminiscences and made a detailed account. I heard the story from Swami Prabhavananda also. He wrote in the *Vedanta Kesari:* 'The milk ran down his chin because he was in deep samadhi; so she wiped his chin with a handkerchief.' This version seems to be reasonable because while in ecstasy a person cannot 'drink glass after glass of milk'. ❐

### 'Ecological Concerns in Hinduism'

Shri P. Ram, I.F.S., Working Plans Officer, Western Circle, Daltonganj, Dt. Palamu, 822101, Bihar, states in his letter dated 28 January 1998: 'There is one correction required in Dr. Satish K. Kapoor's otherwise outstanding article on "Ecological Concerns in Hinduism". On p. 51 [January 1998 issue], under subhead "Plants" the scientific name of *Śami* is mentioned as *Ficus benjamina*, whereas the actual name of *Śami* is *Procopis spicigera.*' The learned author, Dr. Satish K. Kapoor, observes: 'As regards *Śami*, the scientific name indexed is *Ficus benjamina*. The Latin name of the plant is *Procopis spicegera* as pointed by one of your readers. In English the plant is known as "The Golden Fig" and sometimes as "Spring Tree". So, there should be no confusion.' The interested reader may please refer to *Religious and Useful Plants of Nepal and India* by Majupuria and Joshi, pp. 160–1.

### 'News and Reports, Jan. 1998, pp. 168–9'

Swami Paramatmanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, informs that *Miss Santi Prodhan is Headmistress of the Ramakrishna High School for Girls, Kurseong, run under the auspices of the Kurseong Branch of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta.* ❐

# News and Reports

## ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT SIXTY YEARS OF VEDANTA IN FRANCE

*3 to 5 October 1997*

***REPORT PREPARED BY YASHODA***

It was the evening of the second day of October 1997. The air over Paris being polluted, driving was restricted. 150 or so people were expected to converge on Gretz which was again opening its arms wide to receive, as it had always done in the past, seekers of light and learning. The occasion, as the programme announces, *'un congrès exceptionnel'*. All major religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Vedanta were represented. Each of the participants was willing to accept that which makes each different, and each was willing to suspend judgement of those differences to seek a common ground at the silent centre where God's voice murmurs in all the languages. It was a feast: of Light; of silent and guided meditation, prayer and yogasana; of talks — simple and sincere; of talks of historical or philosophical import; of talks of erudition and illumination; of homemade vegetarian cooking and just sharing.

On the evening of the 3rd was presented the film 'Gretz: A Retrospective', a highly professional video production by Emmanuelle Grand, Vincent Lauth and Swami Devatmananda about the Ashrama since its inception. A film of great beauty, it is invaluable for its presentation of the nature and life of men and women, the 'builders' of the Ashrama and the swamis through a mosaic of words, colours and memories.

On the evening of the 4th it was the 'voice' of Sarada — 'Flow of Honey' — that filled the conference room. The power and sweetness of a voice touched by the grace of the Divine, touch the hearts of all. The compact disc made for the congress was in great demand.

At 6 a.m. everyday, silence reigned in the conference-cum-meditation-cum-yogasana room. There was common singing, common praying while some preferred to explore body and breath in yogasana. On the 3rd and 5th Swami Veetamohananda conducted guided meditation sessions.

***Summary of Speeches***

*Friday, 3 October 1997*

**'Judaism' by Joseph and Josette Milgram:** Ms. Milgram read a dense history of the cultural and metaphysical development of a race of people intertwined inseparably with their land, their origin, and their God and His Law. Mr. Milgram, her father, added his own reflections during the course of the lecture. In her talks Ms. Milgram pointed out several similarities between Sanskrit and Hebrew which seemed to indicate the closeness between these ancient peoples. Mr. Milgram reiterated once more the dialogue the Jews have had, and still have, with their God — the prophets who in ancient times were the conveyors of the Word of God — the prophetic warning from an angry God that His people would be condemned, not to death but to exile, should they disobey their God. The history of these people is one of moving away from their land and moving towards their centre, their God. Mr. Milgram raised two questions: (i) Have the Jews confused the spiritual quest of the prophets with the military conquest of the politicians?, and (ii) Why did God talk so much to the Jews 3000 years ago and has remained silent ever since? Mr. Milgram shares the conviction of many that the 21st century will be a spiritual one or it won't be at all.

**'Vedanta' by Swami Amarananda:** Swami Amarananda, during the course of his talk explored the philosophy of Vedanta and the essential practices of sadhana. One message beams through all scriptures and different schools of thought: the quest for direct mystical experience. The means suggested by Swami Vivekananda for this experience are: repetition of the mantra, visualization of the ideal and pranayama. Vedanta is the end of the Vedas, or the Ultimate Wisdom. Swami Amarananda pointed out the three principle schools of thought — of Shankara, of Ramanuja and of Madhva — pointing out the essential elements of each. His talk was packed with information on how Indian philosophy has explored the eternal relation between man and his Essence, his divine Self. The thought, forms and names changed with shift in perception but it seems that the schools, the philosophies, the methods are all landmarks along a multitude of pathways, all valid in themselves. It is practice that eventually takes one out of one's daily trance-experience into direct contact with the Reality beyond Maya.

**'Vedanta Today and Tomorrow' by Swami Veetamohananda:** The ills that prevail in our society today, said Swami Veetamohananda, are essentially of a psychological nature. He called it 'Over-excitement Shock'. We are in full overload crisis: too much to choose from a constant bombardment of novelty and diversity. The need to protect and defend the organism from the perpetual onslaught of information — ideas, words and pictures — creates a constant high level of adrenalin in the body leading eventually to dete-

rioration in health and the whole system. The individual suffers under such stress and acts out this stress in various ways on his environment. The interdependence between the individual (microcosm) and his environment (macrocosm) guarantees that whatever one puts upon one's entourage, the entourage returns; so we are constantly creating an environment which is creating us, and the process seems endless. So what is to be done?

Swami Veetamohananda assured that the solution lay in spiritual awakening, an opening up. Each one of us is unique, each moment that we live is unique, each situation in which we find ourselves is unique. Our 'opening up' is curbed by our ignorance of what we can or cannot change *within* ourselves. If we lack respect and dignity for ourselves, how can we expect it to come from others? That discontent within which reflects unsolved problems, gets projected onto our entourage. The speaker then analysed the masks on the ego that need to be torn off one by one if we are to experience our true nature. Our ego seeks gratification, recognition and reassurance, believing that it is acting so in our best interests. But these efforts which maintain us in our comfort zones are the very sources of the fears that pull us out of those very comfort zones. The Swami stated further that we actively participate in our own failures because we fail to see the self-perpetuating nature of the ego. Courage is required to challenge the grip of the ego — to lead us to new ways of seeing and, therefore, of being. The speaker further asserted that we need to become responsible actors in our own daily lives. It is the fear of responsibility — our inability to hold ourselves responsible alike for the outcome of our richness and shortcomings — that prevents us from confronting our own misery. The Swami concluded his speech assuring us that the awakened life is worth the suffering it entails, that the long night of transition takes one from darkness to Light, from untruth to Truth. This awareness enables us to glow as it were, lighting the way for other fellow travellers.

*Saturday, 4 October 1997*

**'Christianity' by Père Maurice Gardès:** Mr. Gardès, a traveller, a Christian, pauses along the wayside for a moment to tell fellow travellers of his own path, what it has meant, and still means, to him. He invites us to stop awhile, to be with him in communion, in Gretz. Mr. Gardès believed that this meeting at Gretz might be just the place where one would hear the voice of God speaking through someone, not necessarily the guest speaker. He spoke of the need to create such a meeting place on a daily basis, a place where the concerns of the ego were momentarily displaced in order to reveal an opening to an inner territory. The need for protecting and defending the organism from the external environment is not there in this silent space. 'In communion there lies the path of freedom.'

Père Gardès warned his fellow travellers to know where they were walking, to know whether their path was authentic. Certain qualities needed to be developed, he said, in preparation for the meeting with Christ. These were: service, generosity, trust, kindness and self-control. Each person needed to reflect on what his vocation in life is and to 'become what he truly is'. He held that to be able to forgive ourselves is a pre-requisite to forgiving others. The speaker concluded his talk with a prayer, a quiet moment of Grace: 'May the Soul move us.'

**'Christianity' by Frère Edmond:** Mr. Edmond began with a prayer: I have no past, no future, It is I, who pray to You, Who are listening to me. In the silence of my heart, we meet.... I open my head, heart and body to receive Your Word. It is this praying, this doing now, that opens us to others, said Mr. Edmond and continued: In the silence of the heart I cry out and it is from within that God replies. I take up Christ's cross to travel the long night of obscurity to reach the Light. The speaker told how demanding prayer was, of how much strength was required to pry open the heart, and of how, at the same time, much tenderness was needed to give birth to the Word of God in the heart of the heart. He spoke of four paths: the path of the Word of God (reading, meditating, praying and contemplating), the path of Love, the path of cultivating His Presence (contemplation of an Image) and the path of Silence. The speaker pictures the process of taking the Word of God into oneself as one would food, chewing gently on it, rocking it to and fro in the cradle of the heart, allowing it to germinate, and bring forth fruit. The heart must become like that of a child — the unwounded one within each of us — the one capable of responding with frankness and purity. A lamp needs to be taken to go down to the depths within to discover our misery — that which we share with every other human being by virtue of being just that. It is the dark night, the speaker said, that gives birth to Light. This was one of the many beautiful moments of the congress.

**'A Pilgrim of the Absolute' by Soeur Marie:** Soeur Marie talked of her own path, the important influence of Zazen on her own practice. She shared with us the obstacles she had dealt with, notably that of falling asleep during meditation. She demonstrated a technique of moving her body while repeating a prayer which she assured was an excellent antidote for sleep. To the re-

porter this exercise felt like a mixture of Qi Cong and Hatha Yoga with more focus on the words than on the flow of energy in and around the body. This experimentation revealed that we were gathered in good faith, willing to try, willing to experiment before judging one way or the other. The speaker continued: Compassion is the fertilization of the Word of God in our hearts. Prayer is a labour of the soil. We need to turn the soil within our hearts so the heart gives forth its fruit. She led us in a prayer and asked us to repeat the prayer slowly so that each word and its energy glided into our hearts and took root there. She asked us to listen as we say the prayer, to be present outside the habit and inside the Word. She opined that for most of us habit rides hard and we gallop through in mechanical breath patterns. Much work needs to be done, she felt, before we break habit and slide into freshness, newness and readiness to hear the Word of Christ.

**'Buddhism' by Venerable Shobita:** The speaker began by reading his lecture — loud and insisting. Somehow his words drift into a drowsy hum which he sensed may be because he broke the monotony with a series of meta-commentaries on the content of his lecture, his relationship with the listeners and 'what is happening now'. With the permission of the Swami he concluded his speech with a chanted Buddhist blessing.

## VEDANTA AND BUDDHISM: A DEBATE

*Swami Amarananda, Nguyen Huu Khoa, Han Veenings, Yves Baudron*

The reporter identifies most closely with the third speaker, Han Veenings, who stated quite clearly that, as a father, husband, and participating member of the society, he had no time to debate the fine lines separating religions. He was simply seeking something that worked for him. He said: what is sure is that change is permanent; there is an intrinsic sadness inherent in all that passes; this illusion breeds unhappiness; there is a need to develop courage and a positive thinking to penetrate this illusion; that this was not to find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; to find the permanency which will solve all our worries, we need to remember our inner force, to view things from a meta-position being in the here and now and not in the regret of the past nor the fear of the future; we need to be vigilant.

Nguyen Huu Khoa said that Zen was his cultural heritage which he had not questioned for 20 years. He held that the real work was in breaking through habits and finding fresh viewpoints.

Both Swami Amarananda and Yves Baudron debated the disputes and misunderstandings that arose from the clashing of values between religions and both held that through deeper exploration a common ground could easily be found if time and willingness were invested in this search.

*Sunday, 5 October 1997*

**'Islam' by Mohammed Aiouaz:** Md. Aiouaz took us on a rapid but profound tour of the spiritual tenets and practices of Islam, The practices are five-fold: Praying, Prostration, Fasting, Giving of Alms (charity), and Respecting Islamic Law.

Moslems pray five times a day breaking the daily trance in which we live tuned in on our little selves. We open ourselves to God, our greater Self, in prayer. Prayer is accompanied by prostration: the first prostration symbolizes man's annihilation before God. The second reminds man that it is pride that makes him think that he exists without God and that because of pride one does not separate God from man by attempting to humble oneself before Him. Fasting is a way of making an offering to God. There are no monastic orders in Islam; it is considered an illusion to imagine that one can remove oneself from the world and meet God. Islamic Law is described somewhat in the way one might talk about the law of a Mandala: the exoteric law that is visible is compared to the circumference of a circle that gives a framework to life; that leads one to the centre of the circle if these laws are observed. Once in the centre, one realizes that the centre is the periphery as well — the esoteric law of the silent invisible centre. Here we find something that matches with all the other speakers: the ego which functions in the outer circle needs to be given up, to open up, so that the soul may speak in silence, in harmony, with That which is named God. Once this opening has taken place, there is a realization that the still centre and the outer ring are one and the same, and the difference is in name and form. He says clearly that only a few are apt to receive this revelation, to realize this Truth. The speaker said further that it is like merchants who display their wares: people come to buy what they are able to consume, what they can afford to buy. It is there for all but not available to everyone in the same manner or to the same degree. On charity he said: 'When we don't possess, we thank:/When we possess, we give./He who wishes to know, must love.

## CLOSING CEREMONY

Père Maurice Gardès was the chairperson and there were seven speakers besides him in the closing ceremony. Each speaker spoke about the Congress of Light.

**Michel Saulnier** (Archdeacon of Meaux) saw unity suffusing this congress. Forgiveness and reconciliation were indispensable elements for the creation of this unity. Other religions offer us

mirrors of ourselves, 'one exists in the eye of the other'; so we must listen to others if we are to learn something about ourselves and our values.

**Jacques Bicheron** (Vicar of Gretz) doubted our ability to achieve unity. He contrasts the inevitable slowness of institutions to change to the quickness of spirit of those individuals who wish to embrace change. On how to grow under such circumstances, he gave the analogy of the strawberry bush — a modest little plant that occupies very little space — which waits for new earth to fertilize it so that it may blossom and bring forth much fruit when the time is ripe.

**SE M. Chiranjivi Singh** (Indian Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris) said that the path of Sri Ramakrishna was one of yearning and longing and not one of intellectual cogitation. Sri Ramakrishna used the imagery of a man having his head held under water until he panted for a breath of air. One has to want God more than one's own life, if one is to find God. This is the way of total surrender. But how can we totally surrender ourselves, being as we are so full of ourselves, asked Mr. Singh. Even if we understand the message, how are we to really do this? He observed that the Ramakrishna Movement shows how to acquire knowledge of God while still living our daily lives.

**Mr. Mahesh** (Founder of the Franco-Indian Cultural Centre and Founder of the French Federation of Hatha Yoga) recollected memories of Gretz and Swami Siddheswarananda. He was there, he said, the day the centre was opened fifty years ago. He recalled how the words of Swami Vivekananda influenced his early life in India and how he was astonished at Vivekananda's feat of turning a 2-minute appearance at the Chicago World Parliament of Religions into an epoch-making event. Swamiji, he said, broke through the cultural barriers and organizational dogma with his sincere message of the heart. Mr. Mahesh reminded his audience that Vivekananda was Ramakrishna's disciple and described the very special relationship that existed between the teacher and the disciple.

**Gilbert Pillet** (Mayor of Gretz) welcomed such a discourse on his home territory and felt that it was one way of promoting harmony between people — of developing an awareness among people that seeing things differently does not automatically imply conflict. He acknowledged that this was what was needed most vitally in his constituency on a daily basis.

**Mr. Bikas Sanyal** (UNESCO) distributed a document which outlined ten major events that led to the creation of the Ramakrishna Movement. He placed the centre in Gretz in historical perspective and gave new-comers to the Movement important information.

**Swami Veetamohananda** (President of the Ramakrishna Vedantic Society and Learning Centre) pointed out that to co-exist we need to accept the plurality of religions. It is a process of inclusion and not of exclusion because religions are complementary and not contradictory. Each religion has its own distinctive soul, its own values, its own specificity: Islam specifies fraternity; Christianity specifies love and charity within Christ; Buddhism specifies renunciation, compassion, non-violence; Vedanta specifies the Unity of Consciousness, the need for direct experience and the attitude of acceptance. The mission of each, he said, is to remain alive and intact. The Swami said that we need to take the resources from each and incorporate them in order to enrich one's own tradition. This is an opening up that will help one along one's own religious path. In an attempt to promote harmony, which criteria, he asked, could we accept as being true to all religions? Citing three possibilities, revelation, reason and sense experience, he refuted all three and claimed that direct experience transcending the senses is the only valid tool for obtaining knowledge and recognition of the Unity underlying the diversity. Acceptance of diverse manifestation is what brings about greater awareness of Unity.

**Père Maurice Gardès** said in his presidential address that the fear of going towards the other created obstacles and yet it was only through opening up that we could bring freedom and love into our lives. We talk about the silence of God, he said and asked, what about the deafness of man? We need to become inhabited by silence to better hear our brothers and our neighbours, he said. ❐

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA KUTIR, ALMORA

### *Second Phase of Centenary Celebrations*

The first phase of the centenary celebrations of the Foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission and of Swami Vivekananda's Lectures at Almora after his triumphant return from the West was reported in *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1997, p. 650. In the second phase of the celebrations, many towns of the Kumaon Region such as **Nainital, Bageswar, Kupkote, Rudrapur, Pant Nagar, Kausani** and **Dwarahat** were covered. In many of these towns local Centenary Celebration Committees were formed. Sri B.D. Pandey (ex-Governor of Punjab and West Bengal) remained the over-all President of all the local committees. Functions in these towns were mostly conducted by these local committees with funds collected by them.

Competitions in essay writing, elocution, recitation and quiz based on the life and teach-

ings of Swami Vivekananda were organized in different educational institutions. Books and other materials for the competitions were made available to the institutions through the Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora. Some institutions organized preliminary competitions in their towns. The final competitions in different towns were conducted by the respective town celebration committees. More than 30 schools and colleges took part, the total number of competitors being more than 1500. Books and religious articles worth about Rs. 12,000/- were given as prizes to successful competitors and certificates of participation were given to all competitors at meetings held in the respective venues.

The main functions started on 12 November 1997. A religious public meeting was organized at **Nainital** C.R.S.T. college hall and prizes were distributed to successful competitors. A youth camp was organized on the 13th in the Youth Hostel and a spiritual retreat for grown-ups on the 14th. Swami Bhagavatananda, Head of the Kanpur Ashrama conducted both the youth camp and the spiritual retreat.

Similar public meetings and prize-distribution ceremonies were held at **Bageswar** in the hall of the Post-graduate College on the 16th, at **Kupkote** in the compound of a local private ashrama named 'Ma-Thakurer-Jay' in the afternoon of the 16th, at **Pant Nagar** in the Agricultural University on the 17th, at **Rudrapur** in the Saraswati Sishu Mandir and Janata Inter College on the 18th, at **Kausani** in the hall of the Pant Museum on the 19th, and at **Dwarahat** in the Municipal Hall on the 20th. In these meetings successful competitors displayed their performance very nicely. Most of the meetings were well attended.

Swami Bhagavatananda of Kanpur Ashrama, Swami Vipashananda of Khetri Ashrama and Swami Satyarupananda of Raipur Ashrama were the main speakers. Swami Siddhidananda, President of the Ramakrishna Kutir, was present in all the meetings and expressed his thankfulness to the people for their participation and active cooperation. He suggested that the local centenary celebration committees be transformed into permanent local committees to conduct different public service activities and to organize Pathachakras in their respective towns. The committee at Nainital has already started the Pathachakra and organized some well-attended sittings. ❐

## CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS: RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND SWAMIJI'S RETURN TO INDIA

The **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi,** held a public meeting with 1000 persons attending it, on 2 November 1997 presided over by Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, and brought out a souvenir which was released by the Swami.

The **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar,** organized a four-day programme from 23 to 26 October 1997. A blood bank, a safe drinking water plant for the hospital, and a laparoscopic surgery unit were inaugurated by Sri Gegong Apang, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. In the public meetings held on this occasion, Sri Gegong Apang, Swami Adhokshajananda Tirtha, Shankaracharya of Govardhan Math, Puri, and several other eminent persons spoke. A Surgeons' Conference and the North East Zonal Continuing Medical Education Programme were organized with the collaboration of the Association of Surgeons of Assam in which about 150 surgeons from all over India participated.

The **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kishanpur,** held a day-long programme on 16 November 1997 to commemorate Swami Vivekananda's visit to Dehra Dun a hundred years ago.

The **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramharipur,** organized a spiritual retreat on 19 October 1997, in which 270 devotees participated. The Centre, in collaboration with **Saharjora High School,** conducted a public meeting on 21 November.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad,** organized the 3rd phase of the Centenary Celebrations from 14 to 17 November with three public meetings addressed by distinguished persons and a youth convention attended by 151 college students.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dacca,** held a public meeting on 11 December which was presided over by Srimat Swami Gahanananandaji Maharaj. Mr. Abul Hasan Chowdhury, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, and several other eminent persons addressed the meeting which was attended by a large number of people.

The **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur,** organized a two-day programme on 6 and 7 December. Public meetings addressed by distinguished persons, a drama and devotional songs formed part of the programme.

The **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bagerhat,** held a three-day celebration of the centenary of the

Ramakrishna Mission which was inaugurated by Swami Gahanananandaji Maharaj. Public meetings and various other programmes were organized on the Ashrama premises and at Khulna and Jessore.

The **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Khetri,** celebrated the centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission and the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's third visit to Khetri, from 11 to 17 December with processions and public meetings at Babai village, Khetri and Khetrinagar. Sri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, unveiled a newly installed statue of Swamiji and addressed a public gathering of about 15,000 people at Khetri on the 14th.

The **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai,** conducted teachers' and devotees' conventions on 6 and 7 December respectively which were attended by 155 teachers and 120 devotees.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Garbeta,** held a seminar on 20 December which was attended by nearly 300 students. The **Ramakrishna Math, Antpur,** organized a public meeting and various competitions among boys and girls on 25 December.

The **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip,** conducted meetings in four schools during October–November 1997, and a teachers' and guardians' conference and a students' convention on 19 and 20 December respectively. ❐

**Vivekananda Foundation,** *(Attn. Ms. Ann Myren),* Post Office Box 1351, Alameda, California 94501, USA, in their circular of Fall 1997 state as follows: ...the Vivekananda Foundation has persisted in its efforts to make the teachings of Swami Vivekananda widely accessible. Even though *Living at the Source: Yoga Teachings of Vivekananda* was first published in 1993, it is still selling about 1,000 copies a year. In 1996 the Foundation donated a copy of *Living at the Source* to each of 1000 public libraries. *We are continuing this service, but with a new approach.* Libraries worldwide may request a free copy of *Living at the Source* through the Foundation's newly established Web site....*Requests may please be made on library letterhead. To visit the Foundation's Web site, the* URL *is <vivekananda.org>.* The site has three major functions: (i) to present Vivekananda's thought, in his own words by means of lecture-summaries with relevant comments from various sources; (ii) to provide information about the Foundation—its work, books, tapes and other resources; (iii) to make the resources of Vedanta known to as wide an audience as possible. *The site was opened on Swamiji's birthday in March 1997 and has received far over 50,000 requests to view it!*

## साधनगीता (Gita for Spiritual Practice)

*(Continued from page 411)*

body, etc., states like waking, etc., and attributes like sattva, etc. Thus, for one who always has intense dispassion and discrimination and who practises enquiry into his Self, the Realization of the Self of the form of clear Knowledge devoid of all other modifications dawns through true perception as, 'I am, verily, Brahman alone.' The credibility of Knowledge is understood through the Lord's utterances such as, 'Verily, there is nothing here as pure as Knowledge' (4.38), 'The Knower, however, in My opinion, is verily My Self" (7.18), etc.

एतावता कर्मभक्तिध्यानज्ञानयोगानां मोक्षोपायानां प्रयोजनमुक्तम्। अथ एतद्योगपराः श्लोकाः भगवदुक्ताः कर्मयोगभक्तियोगादिविभागेन व्याख्यायन्ते।

So far, the efficacy of the ways of action, of devotion, of meditation and of knowledge which are the paths to Liberation, has been explained. Now, the verses on these Yogas uttered by the Lord will be commented upon separately, classifying them into the way of action, the way of devotion, etc.

*(to be continued)*

# Reviews and Notices

***GOD LIVED WITH THEM (American Edition), Swami Chetanananda; publ. Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.; 1997; pp. 656; $25.95.***

Mysticism is as old as religion. Of all the religious literature, the sweetest is lives of saints. Knowledge comes to us in two ways — directly and indirectly. Indirect knowledge is gained from scriptures. Direct knowledge comes from personal experience. Scriptures show us the path to the Divine while supersensuous knowledge leads to divine experience. Sri Ramakrishna would say: 'A person does not become intoxicated even by rubbing siddhi (Indian hemp) to his body. He must swallow it.' (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994, p. 524). Ramakrishna stressed the importance of holy company time and again. To find great ones who have seen God, however, is not easy. We have to repeatedly search for them like Swami Vivekananda did. We cannot find those who have seen God, in the supermarket. In a busy world as ours, we have been tied down by engagements. So, saints come to us in the form of books. The lives of saints not only inspire us, they train us, guide us and show us the pitfalls along the spiritual path. Many people think about God, some have had a glimpse of Him too. But, to live with Him constantly is something extraordinary. The title of the book under review means both: that the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lived with Him while He was in the mortal body and also that they lived with Him till they themselves left their bodies. That is, these sixteen disciples whose lives we read in *God Lived With Them* were such illumined souls that they lived in constant communion with the Divine. There is perhaps no comparison in all history to such heroes. While the whole world struggles to keep the mind at a higher level, these great ones struggled to bring their minds down so as to help humanity. We read about such men in this book.

The first ever book in English about any disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was that on Swami Vivekananda. His Eastern and Western disciples published his life as early as in 1912. Next, a book containing the lives of both lay and monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was published in 1943. Christopher Isherwood wrote *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* in 1964. Swami Gambhirananda ji compiled and published in 1967 the *Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna* which contained only the lives of monastic disciples. All those were not meant to be very exhaustive. Thus, there was a long-felt necessity of the detailed lives of both lay and monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Chetanandaji's two books, *They Lived With God* (1989) and the present one, fulfil this need. While *They Lived With God* presents the lives of the householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the present one is about the sixteen monastic disciples. In passing, one may remark that while the earlier biographies were written considering sources with great strictness, Swami Chetanananda has liberally scanned various publications for preparing this work. Thus, the book gathers many hereto unknown instances and ideas. This only enhances the beauty of any mystical literature.

To understand the workings of the mind of a sadhaka is not easy. More so is the problem in the case of an illumined soul of such high calibre as the direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The intense yearning, the struggle, the aspiration, the joy at fulfilment and the bliss which follows are not given to others to understand. But, Swami Chetanananda has scored a point here: it may probably be owing to his own association with some of the disciples of these sixteen great ones, he has been able to retain the 'heat' of the lives in this book to some extent.

Sri Ramakrishna's disciples varied in tastes, aptitudes, spiritual experience, and so on. There was, however, one thing in common. It was their deep love for Sri Ramakrishna and his ideals. The variations mentioned above were only sweet varieties and nothing else. It is therefore said that each one of them was one-sixteenth part of Ramakrishna.

We may conveniently divide the lives of disciples into three stages. The first was upto the passing on of Sri Ramakrishna. They were 'boys' then. Their lives were centred on studies and spiritual aspiration. There was a mixture of fun with seriousness. These simple, pure children of light were all in search of their resplendent teacher. At Dakshineswar, administering elixir to everyone that came by was Sri Ramakrishna, who awaited his spiritual children to come. He had established the foundations of eternal religion which was new in the sense that there were no borders to it anywhere. He had rediscovered many number of truths. His disciples were to disseminate them for the good of the world. One

by one, all of them came at ripe moments to him. Not knowing who their children were and what role they were to play in the world, the parents of these children wanted them to pursue their studies. They wanted lions to remain lambs. All failed. The boys broke all barriers and ran to their Master who was ready with sumptuous spiritual food for them. The love which they received from him was unforgettable. The training too went on. From taking care of personal belongings to spiritual sadhana — everything was taught systematically. Time, however, was running short. Sri Ramakrishna returned, and the curtain to the first Act of the unique spiritual drama fell.

The second phase of the lives of these heroes was one of hardship. Three things happened now. Changes came by at three levels. Individually, each one of the disciples glowed spiritually even as their austerities increased. They travelled extensively during the period facing starvation, illness and difficulties. Collectively, while the movement began to take a solid shape even without the knowledge of all these disciples, the world itself witnessed great changes. Swamiji's participation at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago brought about subtle changes in the religious field with far-reaching effect.

The final phase was when each disciple became a sun himself, enlightening the world according to his calling. It was a period when the Math and the Mission were established on firm grounds. Disciples were trained by these disciples. Each one showed his ability as either administrator or preacher or spiritual minister. The culmination came when each one became a martyr to the great cause. Each one's passing was glorious no doubt, but painful to the world.

There is fun, there is seriousness, there is sweetness, there is bitterness of struggle. This work is indeed a textbook on spirituality. As there are precepts, so there is practice. To read each disciple's life is to study the life of many saints put together. For, these apostles were not ordinary mortals. Some were with Christ, some with Rama, some with Krishna, some with Chaitanya, one from the seven sages — Sri Ramakrishna had already accomplished harmony of all faiths, as it were, in his choice of disciples.

In this book one not only reads the lives of the apostles of Ramakrishna, one receives training in almost every field if the lives are read carefully. For example, one can learn how to speak in public, how to solve day-to-day problems, how to react when in adverse situations, how to live methodical lives, and so on. These disciples of Ramakrishna have come to remain as role models for humanity. That is what the book makes us understand.

One or two minor items may be taken care of in the next edition. Instead of the word being spelled as 'Japam', it could be just 'Japa'. In the introductory paragraph in Yogananda's life, due to oversight, inverted commas are missing in a sentence which makes it read adversely. The intention was never to introduce Sri Ramakrishna as 'an eccentric priest of Dakshineswar', whoever may have said so.

The book contains rare and beautiful photographs of all the disciples. It has an excellent index and a detailed list of references. The cover, the style of printing all go to enhance the value of the book.

As I said earlier, the sixteen disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were varied in nature — from engineer to the unlettered, from a boy to an old man, from a devotee to a vijnani — there was great variety. This makes their lives acceptable to every mind. All can benefit from this work. This book contains a long list of spiritual menu — food that inspires us, food that nourishes us, food that guides us, food that corrects us and food that takes us to the Divine. It is no exaggeration to say that *God Lived With Them* is a must for every Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta student in particular, and for every aspirant in general.

*Swami Sunirmalananda*
*Belur Math*

***TRIBUTES TO SWÂMI VIVEKANANDA AFTER A HUNDRED YEAR (1893–1993), vol. 4, Souvenir 1996, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna; publ. Swami Chandrananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramakrishna Avenue, Patna 800 004; 1996; pp. 92+80+C32; Rs. 15/-.***

*Tributes to Swami Vivekananda After a Hundred Year* is the last in a series published by the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna, in commemoration of the first centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Bharat Parikrama and his appearance at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. Apart from a glorious piece on Swamiji's plan, told in his own words, of making India glorious, it provides us glimpses of Swamiji's participation in the historic Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and contains articles on Swamiji's ideas as to religion, education, art, ideal society, and uplift

of women and masses. The tributes written by monks of the Ramakrishna Order and other reputed writers are rich and thoughtful. After reading them one cannot but feel the 'unmistakable presence' of Swamiji in him/her. In that respect, this labour of love and dedication by the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna, has been amply fulfilled and Swami Chandrananda, the Secretary of the Ashrama, deserves to be congratulated on successfully bringing this centenary publication of tributes to a fitting conclusion in this fourth and final volume. The spirit of the volume has been beautifully depicted by artist Ramananda Bandyopadhyay with the cover design of a hundred flowers that represent one hundred years since Swami Vivekananda's address at Chicago in 1893.

Why is it that the five words, 'Sisters and Brothers of America' with which Swami Vivekananda began his address in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago made the thousands of people in the audience rise to their feet in paying tributes to the young Hindu monk from India? The answer is that they were deeply, very deeply touched by these words. And touched they were because these words were uttered in all sincerity by a sannyasin who *meant* every word that he uttered. They were not mere formal words of politeness directed to a foreign audience. Nobody was foreign to the young sannyasin. Every man and woman on the earth, indeed everything that existed on the earth, was his own. He was one with them all, because he was *one with God,* and he saw God in all of them. Jiva was Shiva, his Master Sri Ramakrishna taught him and they all were to be served accordingly. There was the same Atman in everybody. Everybody was divine. Nobody was a sinner. It was the destiny of everyone to travel not from error to truth but from truth to truth — from truth lower to truth higher. Everyone was to attain salvation, not in the Christian sense of being delivered from sinfulness but in the sense of attaining his oneness with God as the goal of continual travelling from becoming to being. 'Oh man, know that you are divine and thus be just your own Self.' That was the message of the young sannyasin, a message not of any particular sectarian religion but of universal religion and it was such a universal religion that was called the *Sanatana Dharma* by the Vedic rishis of India of which the young sannyasin was now the representative at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago.

That was the *message* with which Swami Vivekananda wanted to inspire men everywhere, but, most of all, the people of his own motherland. They needed it most, because being oblivious of their rich heritage in philosophy and culture, they were now sunk in hunger, poverty and ignorance. There was another reason for their befallen state. The upper classes of India drained the country of its vitality by exploiting the vast majority of lower caste people who constituted the masses of India. Women were equally neglected in India. If the country was to be raised, pointed out Swami Vivekananda, then these two — the masses and women were to be raised first. And, of course, they could not be raised by occasional bounty or pitiful 'doles' coming from the upper classes. They could be raised only by a religion which told them that the same Oneness that prevailed in the upper caste people also prevailed in them, that they were not inferior to anybody, that they had the same potential in them as the upper caste people, and that they had to actualize their potential energy and the capacity based on such energy. With such religion at the centre of the scheme, they had to be awakened to the infinite power that lay hidden in them by giving them education, both spiritual and material, but first of all, spiritual.

The same was true for women. No amount of social reform coming from men-folks could deliver women from their bondage. They had to be given spiritually charged education in the ideals of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti and Gargi and in the spirit of valour and heroism of queen Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Sanghamitra, Ahalyabai and Mirabai. Fortified with such a religion and education, the masses and women should be left to themselves to solve their own problems. The ideal is perfect independence, strength and fearlessness. With life-giving religion and character-building education helping women and masses to develop their lost individuality, there is no doubt that the masses and women will stand on their own feet and settle their own problems.

That was Swami Vivekananda. That was his message for inspiring the world in the Oneness of God and his scheme for making India as a nation more by bringing up the power of the people. He had no ambition beyond training individuals up, beyond enabling them to take care of themselves by awakening in them the realization that infinite power was their sacred inheritance from That One. And what was a nation, after all, but the sum total of individual men and women. That was all Swami Vivekananda meant by religion. There was nothing dogmatic about it. He meant by it the awakening of man to the divinity inherent in him and in the special context of India he wanted its realization in the ideals of renunciation and service especially to the poor and the downtrodden of India.

Could there be an idea nobler than the idea of Swami Vivekananda that 'there is no regenera-

tion for India until you be spiritual'? Spirituality is not anti-secularistic, it is just another name for oneness and equality of all souls. As such, it is the foundation of all improvement — moral and material. If as a nation we have fallen so low today, it is because there has been an erosion in the basic foundation on which human life and society rests. The foundation being cracked, all the structures that rest on it — social, economic and political — are also in a state of decay in India today. Let us all, therefore, work at the *foundation*. How prophetic Swami Vivekananda was when he said, 'this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because religion has not been applied to society as it should have been'.

*Dr. Anil Baran Ray*
*Birbhum*

***SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE, R.K. Das Gupta; publ. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029; 1996; pp. 348+xii; Rs. 50/-.***

Swami Vivekananda spoke on varied subjects and, at different times, he spoke on the same subject even. His admirers and critics have generally written or spoken on his ideas regarding education, service, women's problems, problems of India, and so on. Very few have touched upon his comments on Indian scriptures and philosophy. In the book under review, R.K. Das Gupta analyses these latter topics. The book is a compilation of twenty-one lectures delivered by the author of the book at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in his capacity as the Vivekananda Professor of Indology and Indological Research.

Das Gupta's lectures reflect his vast erudition, critical analysis and deep love for Vivekananda's teachings. In each lecture, he first gives a bird's-eye view of the topic, the views of earlier philosophers and commentators, Vivekananda's approach to the subject and his own critical comments. Many a time he significantly reminds the reader that Vivekananda's ideas were founded on the teachings of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

The author has dealt with Vivekananda's thoughts on the *Gita*, the Upanishads, the *Brahmasutras*, the Mimamsa, the Sankhya, the *Yogasutras* and the two Indian epics. Vivekananda was not a commentator in the traditional style and the author says that Swamiji's message is his own voice and if there are echoes of old voices it is because 'they only confirmed *what he wanted to say.*' Some among the other lectures cover Swamiji's views on Western Philosophy, Western Indology, Comparative Religion, Universal Religion and Buddhism. Under the last mentioned head Das Gupta points out that though Vivekananda had great reverence for Bhagavan Buddha, he had 'hard things to say about Buddhism' and these he said right at the Parliament of Religions where some venerable Buddhist scholars were seated—an action that for a young speaker like Vivekananda needed immense courage born out of his devotion to truth. Das Gupta very pertinently points out elsewhere that, let alone Western philosophers, even modern Indian philosophers have failed to take proper cognizance of Vivekananda as a philosopher. This he believes may be due to the fact that Vivekananda was not academic in his treatment of the subjects and that the real source of his message and ideas was his Master, Sri Ramakrishna and not his learning.

One fails to understand why Das Gupta labours so hard to prove that Sri Ramakrishna did *not* practise Tantric Sadhana ('Swami Vivekananda and the Tantric Tradition'). We have on the authority of no less a person than Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the author of the magnum opus, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master,* that the Master *did* practise Tantric Sadhana. The author has no valid arguments to repudiate this. It is not necessary that the Master should have taught his foremost disciple *all* that he knew nor is it necessary that Vivekananda should have talked on *all* that his Master taught him. This one lecture unfortunately stands out as an odd piece in this otherwise grand collection.

Each of the twenty-one lectures brings out fresh insight, though one feels that towards the end the speaker was becoming a bit exhausted. That perhaps is the inevitable consequence of the painstaking study and research he had undertaken. In the words of Swami Lokeswarananda, Das Gupta is an amazing scholar. The brief sketch about him on the back-cover does not do justice to his erudition. The book is a delight and is a pointer on how Vivekananda should be studied. At the price offered, the book is a bargain.

*Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao*
*Hyderabad*

***A PORTRAIT OF SISTER CHRISTINE, Pravrajika Vrajaprana; publ. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029; 1996; pp. 107; Rs. 30/-.***

From the author of the book *My Faithful Goodwin,* we get a pen-portrait of yet another disciple of Swami Vivekananda. There has been no biography of Sister Christine and even the account by Boshi Sen (*Western Women in the Footsteps of Swami Vivekananda,* Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission) is regrettably brief. This is understandable because Christine was extremely self-effacing, shy and reticent.

The book under review is not a detailed biography. It is more an attempt to understand through the letters Swami Vivekananda wrote to Christine, as to how he saw her. For this reason, the book makes more difficult reading than Pravrajika Atmaprana's biography of Sister Nivedita.

Christine was extremely blessed for, at their very first meeting at Thousand Island Park, Swamiji recognized her spiritual strength and gave her *mantra-diksha.* Swamiji obviously wrote her many letters, many of which have not found their way into his *Complete Works* [the ninth volume brought out in February 1997 contains as many as 68 letters of Swamiji to Sister Christine—Ed.], and the reader now gets an opportunity to read some of them, at least in part. Swamiji writes like a concerned, doting father even though Christine was only three years younger to him. He is ever concerned with her physical health; she was extremely frail and worked hard. He is solicitous about her financial condition; she had to assume the burden of looking after her widowed mother and five younger sisters at a young age and throughout her life suffered poverty and privation. Above all, however, he was concerned about her spiritual progress. He knew she was ripe and ready for spiritual liberation and her family obligations seemed to stand in her way. Swamiji writes to her repeatedly not to let duty bind her and it is also an exhortation to most of us who are unwilling and unable to break our worldly ties and are unaware of our spiritual potential: Duty has no end and the world is extremely selfish (p. 28); Duty is the midday sun whose fierce rays are burning...humanity (p. 31); Duty is duty no doubt, but we have our duties not only to our mother... (p. 33).

Swami Vivekananda knew that Christine's real duty was to *his* motherland, to help him in his mission there, and he repeatedly hints at this. Christine did come to India, but very late. She met Swamiji just five or six times and had to leave for the mountains to escape the scorching Calcutta summer, and unlike Nivedita, was not there when he entered *mahasamadhi.* This makes a very poignant chapter in her life. However, her spiritual strength enabled her to withstand the loss and the shock of his death, as is evident from her letters to Josephine MacLeod and Sarah Bull.

Sister Christine devoted the rest of her life to girls' education in India, along with Nivedita—a mission extremely dear to her guru. She carried out her work with great dedication and extreme patience. Though physically frail, she had an indomitable will and faced all tribulations in life with equanimity. She herself hints at her spiritual strength in a beautiful letter to Boshi Sen (p. 105). As the author of the book says, her high ideals reveal a role that we can also enter into.

There are two minor criticisms regarding the presentation. The author would have done well to present the book in chapters. The references should have been collected at the end of the book as 'ibid' is used often and it is irksome to go back many pages to find the relevant reference.

*Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao*

***SISTER NIVEDITA IN SEARCH OF HUMANITY, Santana Mukherjee; publ. Minerva Associates, 7-B Lake Place, Calcutta 700 029; 1997; pp. 187+xi; Rs. 225/-, $20, £10.***

Margaret Elizabeth Noble's was a life of ideas — at once spiritual, social and political — which she made real by making efforts to implement them right through the years she lived her life (1867–1911). Her life, indistinguishable from her work for humanity, could be divided into two distinct periods: (i) 1867–1898, and (ii) 1898–1911. The first belonged to Margaret Elizabeth Noble and the second to Sister Nivedita. Figuratively speaking, the flower of the first period matured into the fruit of the second.

While the fruition or development of Margaret Noble into Sister Nivedita is the main concern of the book under review and therefore the central focus is on her work in India as the disciple of Swami Vivekananda, it throws light also on the first period of her life giving due recognition to the formative influences on her life, namely, a missionary zeal and a nationalistic fervour which was for her an inheritance from her family. If an intense religious feeling and a high nationalistic fervour went into the making of Margaret Noble, her contact with Swami Vivekananda in London in 1895 marked the be-

ginning of the turning of Margaret Noble into Sister Nivedita. The Master gave her three years' time to prepare herself for her future work in India. In January 1898, Margaret was in India and since then there was no looking back. Every moment of her fourteen years of life in India was filled with work, at once spiritual and intellectual, which issued into relentless socio-political ideas exemplifying the life of the idea and the ideals that she lived in India and for India.

What is the idea or the ideal that Sister Nivedita lived and worked for? It is the ideal of unity. The goal of ideal existence, her Master taught her, was not salvation in the sense of being delivered from sin (something that Christianity taught her, making her unhappy in the extreme), but the perception that the One is real, and the many unreal. From such spiritual instructions of the Master, Nivedita drew the conclusion that, being the manifestation of One, humanity is one. It is this perception of life which provided Nivedita with a unique tool in her sociological study of India. Whereas others saw mere events and facts, she saw their inner association, their underlying truths. Her interpretation of Indian social life as related to family, women, education, religion, and art therefore remains a contribution in its own right.

Life was nothing, said Nivedita, if it was not the pursuit of an ideal. 'Life holds no other thing so great as the cause or the idea for which we may joyfully die', wrote Nivedita. Man was athirst for the afar. An appetite for ideals was therefore as real in man as the appetite for bread. An understanding of ideals was thus essential for an understanding of a people and their institutions. Human institutions, Nivedita never tired of saying, were the expression of ideals and as such the primary task of a student of sociology, Nivedita opined, was to discover their ideals. In assigning a full place to ideals as sociological phenomena, Nivedita could bring into her sociological analysis at once the concrete and the abstract, the scientific and the philosophic.

As one who believed spiritually in the unity of all life and as one who analysed social life in the light of its underlying ideals, Nivedita looked upon India politically as an organized unity. Nivedita found the ideal of political unity for India in the idea of nationality. She made it her main political task to awaken India to the idea of nationality by which she meant a people made one under the organic conditions of place. With her assertion that the geographical factor was more important than the traditional race, religion, and language as factors of nationality, Nivedita made a contribution indeed to Indian political thought.

A people who are one in home and one in thinking need not be bothered by a common blood, a common language, or a common religion, Nivedita would assert in defending her thesis of Indian nationality. 'Man only begins by making his home. His home ends by remaking him', observes Nivedita in waxing eloquent over her thesis of a common home as the primary basis of nationality, as far as India was concerned. The diversity of religion, race and language or the unlikeness of the provinces of India, Nivedita argued, enhanced rather than diminished the strength of India as a nation. Hers was the theory of organic unity. Like the limbs of a body — each being different from the other and yet each being related to the other in being part of a whole and in serving the whole in its special way — the complexity of elements in India, far from being a hindrance to nation-formation, contribute to the richness of India as a nation. Each complex element, by serving the whole of the national body in its special way contributes to the wholeness of the whole.

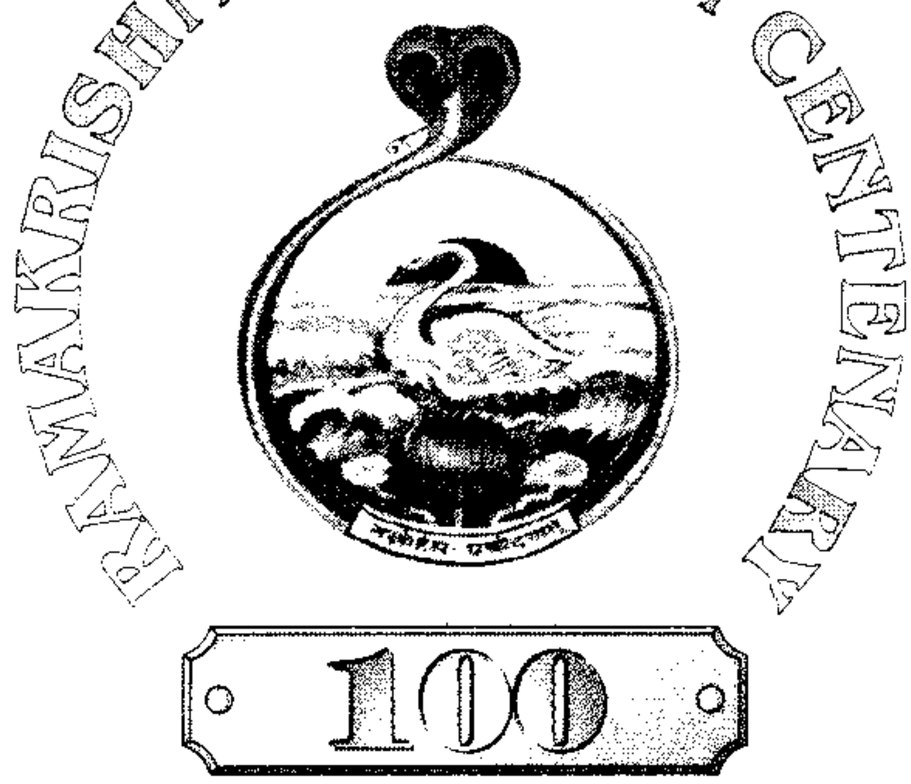
Can India find an answer to her present problem of national integration in Nivedita's theory of organic unity? There is nothing that Nivedita wanted more in life — to see India as a nation, to see the rise of Indian nationality. That was the practical purpose with which she wielded her pen. Is it not the sacred duty, indeed the charge of all of us to make Nivedita's dream come true, especially when we are observing in 1998 the centenary of the great lady's arrival to India?

The author deserves to be fully congratulated for bringing into focus the priceless treasures of Sister Nivedita's thoughts on the eve of such an august occasion. 'My thoughts will be worked out by unnumbered generations', hoped Sister Nivedita. More than anything else, let this be true.

*Dr. Anil Baran Ray*

*Unless you accept Sakti, you will find the whole universe unreal—'I', 'you', house, buildings and family. The world stands solid because the Primordial Energy stands behind it. If there is no supporting pole, no framework can be made, and without the framework there can be no beautiful image of Durga.*

—Sri Ramakrishna



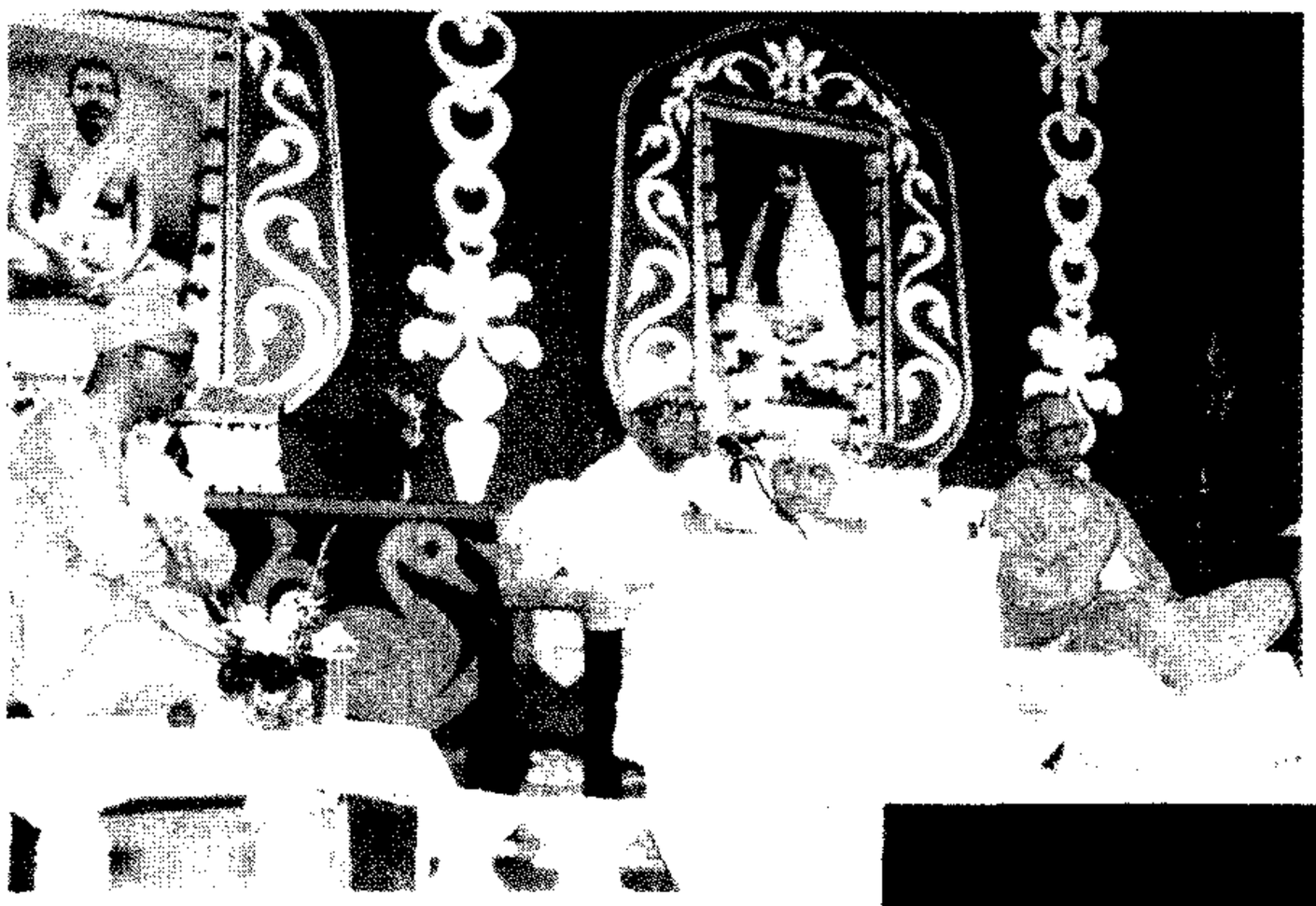
*The two gates erected at Belur Math to commemorate the Centenary Celebration of the Ramakrishna Mission*

***Swami Bhuteshananda***
**President**

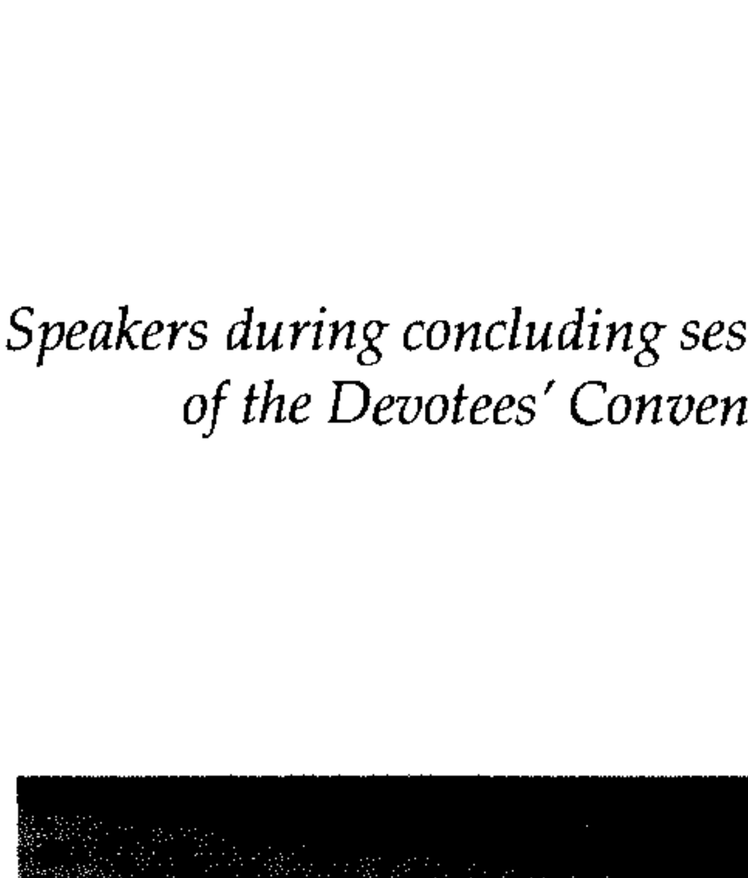
*Swami Ranganathananda*
Vice President

*Swami Atmasthananda*
Vice President

**Senior Swamis during Devotees' Convention**



*Revered President Maharaj speaking to youth delegates*



*Speakers during concluding session of the Devotees' Convention*

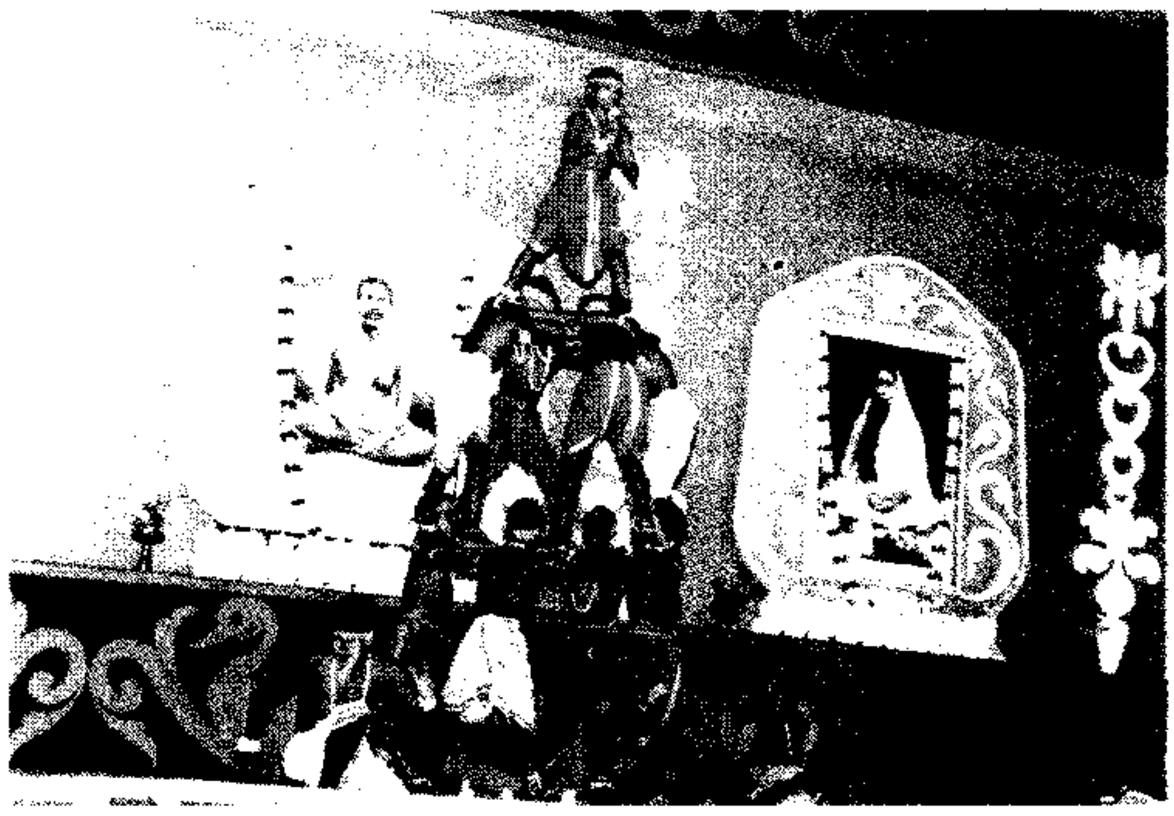
*Justice Venkatachalliah speaking during Convention*

*Youth delegates taking part in a group discussion*

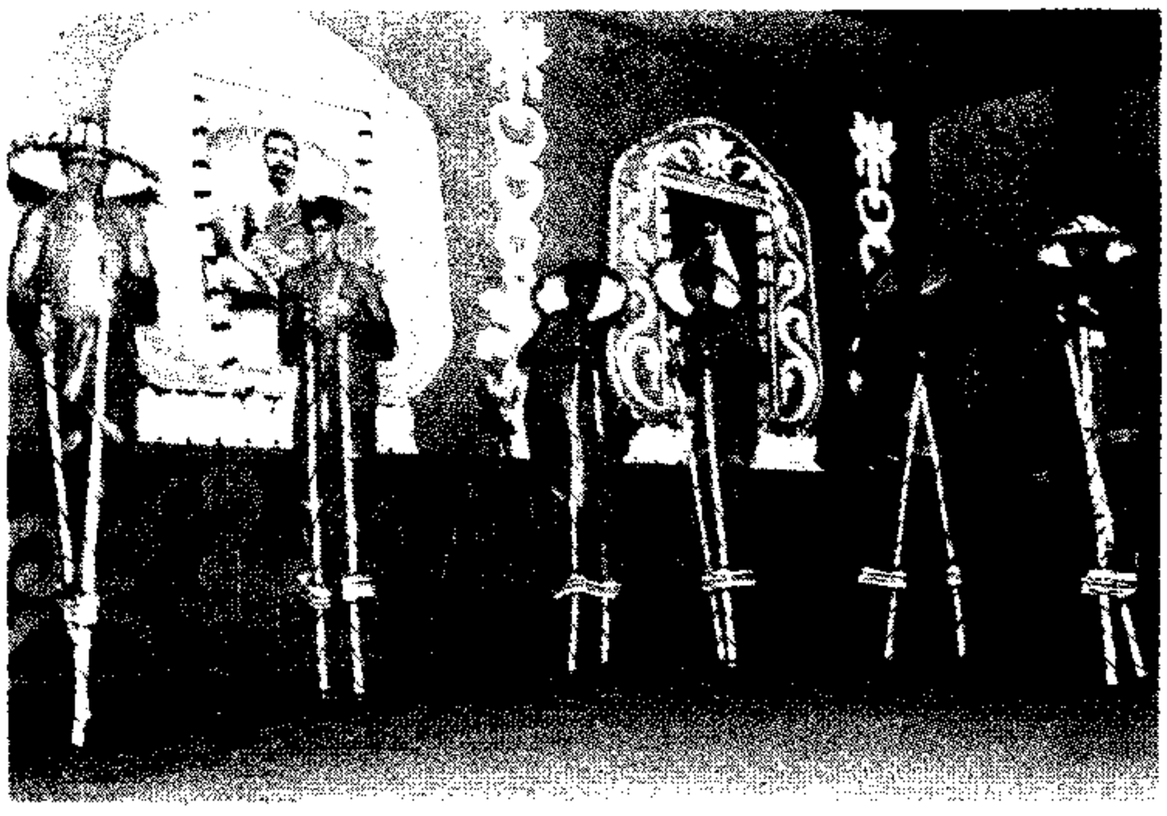
*Young delegates performing a dance*

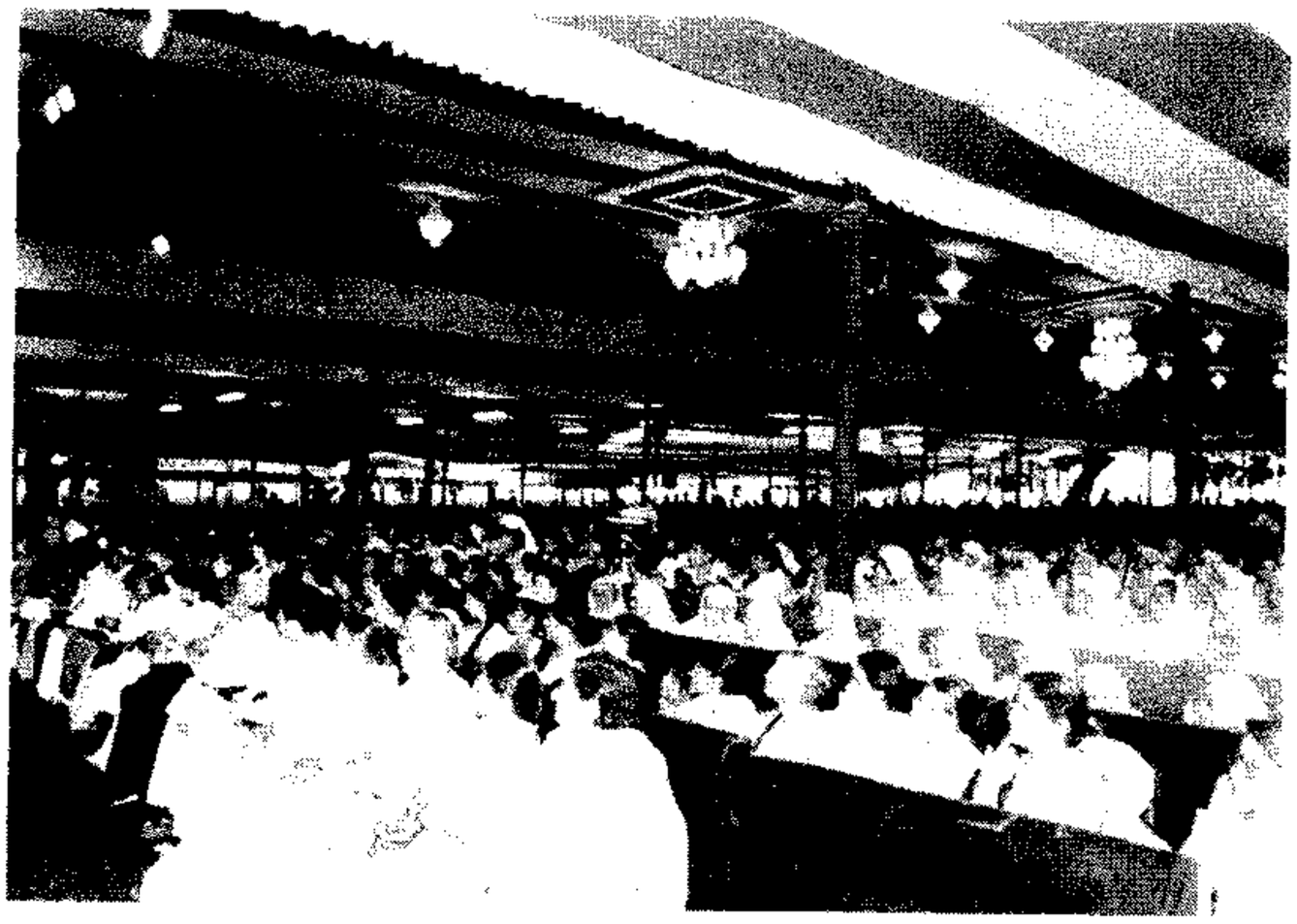
*Lunch Packets preparation for the delegates*

*Band Party during Youth Convention*



*Stage performance of youth delegates*

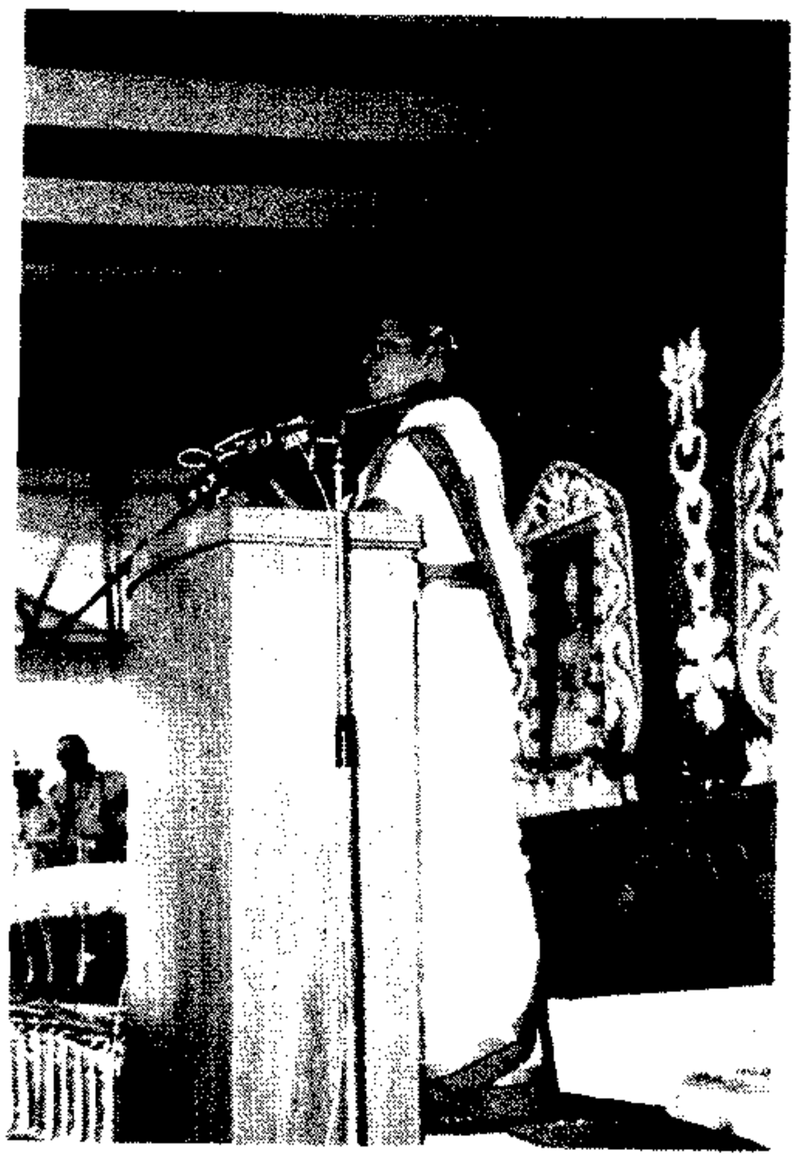




*Top Right*
Dr. Karan Singh
addressing the audience

*Left: Top, Middle and Bottom*
Gathering during
Devotees' Convention

*Bottom Right*
Dr. M. Laxmi Kumari
speaking to delegates



Photography: SURAJIT SEN & DEBASHIS BASU